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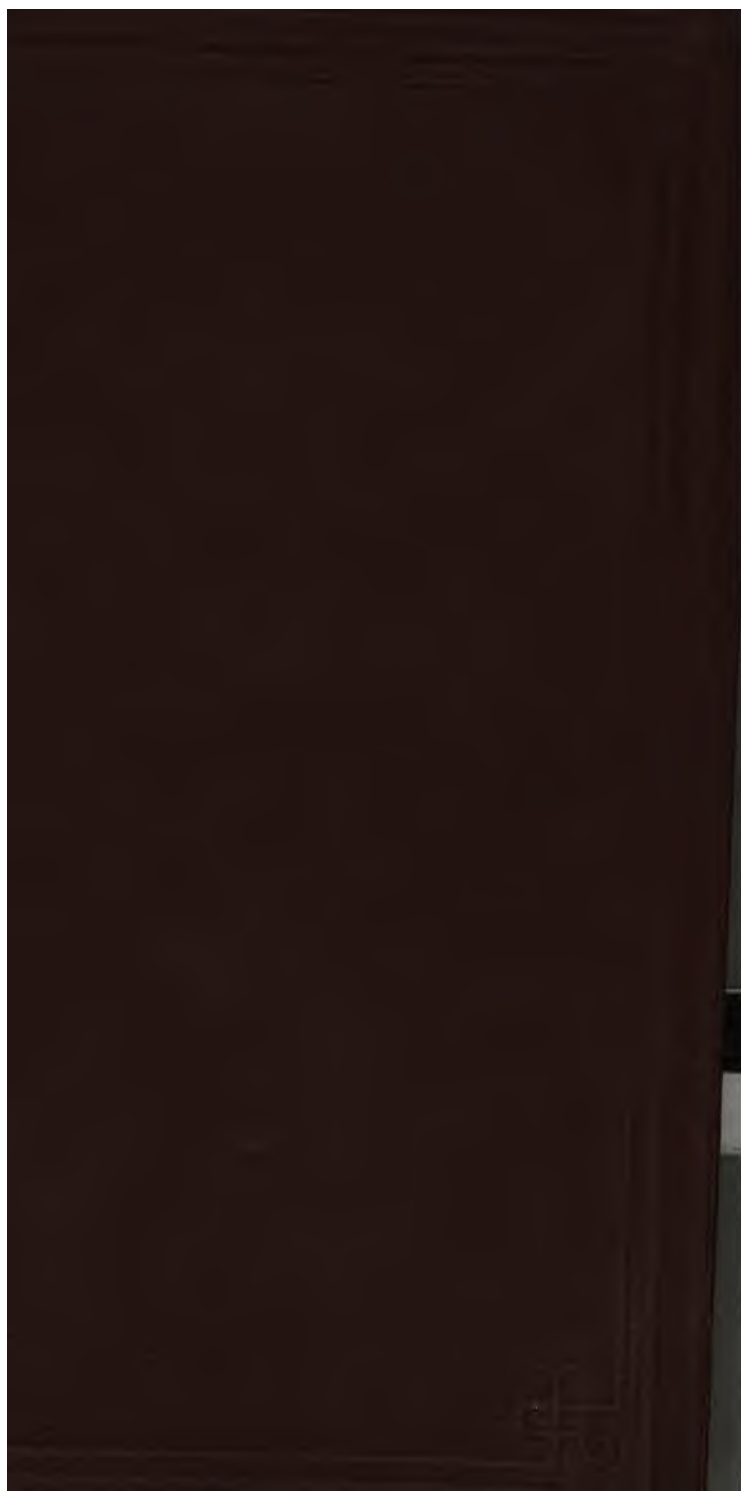
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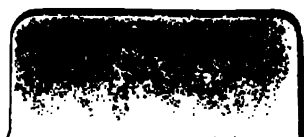
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# HOW TO MANAGE IT.

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# HOW TO MANAGE IT:

A NOVEL.

BY

ILTUDUS THOMAS PRICHARD

(LATE BENGAL ARMY).

'Quæque ipse miserrima vidi.'

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



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# HOW TO MANAGE IT.



## CHAPTER I.

‘How **MANY** can we call upon to-day?’

‘Oh, we shall polish off all the ladies—the bachelors of course you needn’t trouble yourself about. Oh, I nearly forgot my card-case—come along, all right now.’

So saying, the speaker led the way to the door, where a first-rate ‘turn-out,’ consisting of an elegant Calcutta-built buggy and a fine chestnut Arab horse, with silver-mounted harness and everything complete, was waiting to take its owner and his friend a round of visits.

Arthur Graham had, at the time I introduce him to my readers, been about three years in the service of the East India Company. His father, an Anglo-Indian of the old school, who had spent forty-five years in the

same honourable service, had returned to England with his colonel's full pay and off-reckonings, to wait till fortune or a proper valuation of his services should get him a divisional command. He was one of those specimens, occasionally to be met with at Cheltenham and other watering-places, of veteran warriors, victims of the *insalubrity* of the Indian climate, who, after rising to the highest grades in the army, return to their native land, with grey hairs, plenty of money, and sound health, to enjoy the remaining portion of their lives, and weary out their juniors who wait in vain for the line-step. Having procured a cadetship for his second son, Arthur Claverhouse, he gave him an outfit and a hundred pounds, and shipped him off to Calcutta to seek his fortunes in the gorgeous East. In due course of time the young aspirant after military honours awoke one morning to find himself at the mouth of the Hooghly. They were a merry party, the passengers on board the good ship *Plantagenet*, and had spent three months and a half pleasantly enough, with the usual routine of bickering, flirting, and real love-making to which the decks and saloons of East India-men seem especially devoted. And when the time for parting came, there were the custom-

ary tears shed, and farewell words spoken, and the passengers, accompanied by their friends and boxes, descended into 'budgerows' and 'dingies,' and made for shore. Arthur Graham landed, as many, alas! do not, with a heart all his own, untouched by the charms of beauty. A friendship had, however, sprung up between him and one of his fellow-passengers, Burleigh, a young civilian, bent on the same errand as himself of seeking a livelihood, though in a different and more profitable line—a friendship which was destined to stand the test of time much better than salt-water engagements of a similar kind generally do; and when Graham was at Islamabad with his regiment, the 75th Native Infantry, in which at the time I write he had gained his lieutenancy, and saw his friend's name in the *Calcutta Gazette* as posted to the same place in the capacity of assistant magistrate, he was delighted.

There was a degree of similarity in the character of the two young men sufficient to form a foundation for the close intimacy that had sprung up between them; but at a certain point this similarity ceased. Nature had made them both in the same mould, but education parted them. Frank Burleigh was several years senior to Graham, and had the

advantage of spending two years at Oxford before he went to Haileybury : and as far as acquisition of knowledge is concerned, he had made a good use of his time. Gifted by nature, energetic and painstaking, and decidedly a man of genius, Burleigh's mind had early been taught to take nothing for granted, and to believe nothing till proved. As a child he had been called 'enquiring,' as a boy 'precise and argumentative,' and as a man he was a sceptic. At Oxford he had fallen into the style of reasoning adopted by the metaphysical school, and carrying his ideas of German philosophy to Haileybury with him, he had laboured to inoculate the less acute minds of the students there with his favourite notions. The opposition he met with from men of superior talent to himself, had the effect of increasing rather than counteracting his tendency to scepticism, and he parted from the college tutors after going through the usual course of education under them with credit and distinction, leaving on their minds the impression that their pupil would turn out a useful servant of government, but a dangerous member of society.

Like Burleigh, Arthur Graham was by nature bold, open-hearted, and honest : he had, however, been brought up by religious parents,

and the lessons instilled into his heart in early childhood had remained uneffaced by his intercourse with the world in miniature as one meets with it in a public school. His manners were blunt and unpolished, and in his anxiety to speak the truth he sometimes overlooked the fact that there are truths which need not always be spoken : aware of a certain tendency to unsociability in his disposition, he did his best to counteract it by courting popularity among his companions, but it was only where he was thoroughly known that he was really liked. Those who knew him slightly thought him reserved and censorious, and seldom cared to cultivate his acquaintance ; but in his own regiment there was no officer so popular. He was a keen sportsman, a first-rate rider, and not a bad hand with a cue ; and in all games and amusements he was the first to start and the last to give in. Attentive to his work, he soon mastered the details of military duty. Born in India, though educated in England, to which country he was taken when six years old, he soon acquired a perfect colloquial knowledge of the language, and as most of the native officers and many of the oldest non-commissioned officers in the regiment had served under his father, and recollected Graham himself as a child, and not a few had played with

him, and even dandled him in their arms, he was as great a favourite in the ranks as among the officers: it was generally said in the corps, that the men would do anything for Graham, and go anywhere with him; and so, to do them justice, they would—at one time.

Of his family I need say but little further than that misfortune had cast a shade over the path of life that Colonel Graham once thought he would tread in sunshine to the grave. His wife, whom he had loved tenderly, met a violent death in Affghanistan—at the time when crooked policy and ill-starred ambition had led English ladies, under the guardianship of British troops, to settle down in quiet confidence in the capital of a fanatical Mahometan kingdom in Central Asia. In plainer words, she perished in the Cabul massacre; and if neither Eyre nor Kaye, nor any of the historians of the war, have described that lady's melancholy fate, it is no fault of mine. After the revelations once made of the mutilation of the Affghan despatches, who dares to deny anything that anybody chooses to assert did take place at Cabul? But in truth it has nothing to do with my story, and so I may pass on without discussing the question further; and if any critic chooses to assert that Mrs. Graham did not perish at Cabul, it can make

no possible difference to anybody if I choose to assert she did.

Sad as was this blow to the colonel's feelings, it was scarcely so great as one he was smarting under at the time, and which cast a shade of sadness over his whole life; and that was the ill-conduct of his eldest son, several years older than Arthur. He was a favourite child of nature, ingenious, clever, active alike in mind and body, and seemed destined to excel in any walk in life. But he was reckless, wild, selfish, and unprincipled. For years he gave his father, and all who had the care of his education, the greatest possible amount of anxiety and trouble, and ended in absconding from his home one day after his father had been speaking seriously to him about his way of life, and endeavouring by persuasions and entreaty to win his unruly child back to the paths of virtue. From that time none of his friends ever heard of him, and it was supposed he had ended his days in some drunken broil, or enlisted as a private soldier and gone abroad.

This brief account having been given of two of the characters that appear prominently in the following narrative, let us follow them in their projected round of visits upon the residents at Islamabad.



‘Who are we to call upon?’ asked Burleigh of his friend as soon as they passed through the garden gate: ‘tell me as we go along.’

‘First and foremost there are the Stevensens; but I shall not take you there first.’

‘Why not?’

‘Because if we go there first we shall stay all the morning—we’ll go to the Smiths’ first.’

‘Which way?’

‘Turn to the right—there, the second house on the left-hand side of the road is theirs.’

‘Who are these people?’

‘Smith belongs to my regiment, a captain—here we are.’

They pulled up at the door of a neat little bungalow, surrounded by a neat little burnt-up garden: a child of five years old was playing in the verandah with a very sulky-looking bearer; an orderly sepoy, of the 75th Native Infantry, was lounging about before the doorway.

To the question, if the lady was at home, the sulky bearer vouchsafed no reply, but, taking two cards from Graham’s hand, went inside to see: after the lapse of a few minutes he returned and said, the ‘mem sahib’ was not at home.

The white lie of ‘not at home,’ when the individual of whom it is spoken is in the next

room, perhaps looking through the window at the visitor who is subjected to this gratuitous deception, has unhappily been imported along with many other customs of polite life in the West which we should have done well to have left in the other hemisphere. A white lie it is generally called in England, which means, I suppose, a lie that does not deceive, or a lie that may be blamelessly told (in either case the explanation is an anomaly). Certainly not one in a thousand, when told by a servant in England that his or her mistress is 'not at home,' goes away with the impression that the lady in question is on that account necessarily out; everybody knows that it means nothing more than 'that for some reason or other it is inconvenient to admit you,' and in this sense the expression may be excused as a conventionality: but in India this is scarcely the case. Very possibly neither party may be deceived, but the native servant who conveys the message cannot understand so well as we do the nature of a so-called conventionalism, and in his ideas he is the bearer of a direct falsehood from one white face to another. The habit is the more to be regretted as there is no necessity in this country for adopting it, the expression 'the door is shut,' (or 'darwaza band,') being quite as polite and as much to the purpose as

'not at home,' and has this advantage, that it is giving utterance to a direct truth instead of a direct falsehood.

'Thank goodness for that,' said Graham in an under-tone—'drive on, Frank. Slow fellow Smith. Mrs. S. decidedly vulgar; she sleeps all day or muddles about the house in a dressing-gown, leaving that pretty little child to the tender mercies of that tame ourang-outang to teach him all kinds of mischief, and give him a chance of getting fever in the hot wind. Keep along the road: Mrs. Murray lives down at this end of the station. Murray is a good fellow,' (Graham went rattling on, as his friend had nothing to do but to listen while he looked after his horse, which was a spirited animal, and required a tight hand,) 'he's only lately married. Mrs. Murray is a nice person, or would be, if she could extend her ideas beyond her George and baby; but she can't.'

'And the husband?'

'Oh, Murray, he has two prominent ideas, and they are Eliza and the baby; but he's a good Irregular Cavalry officer, at least so everyone says, and as thoroughly goodnatured a fellow as ever breathed, noisy though.—Here we are—take care how you turn; don't, for goodness' sake, drive against the shrubs.'

A winding gravel road, flanked by grass

plots interspersed with flowering shrubs, led up to the verandah of a large bungalow.

‘Holloa, Graham! glad to see you,’ said, or rather roared, (he never spoke under a roar,) Captain Murray, emerging through an open glass door on to the verandah, as Burleigh pulled up. ‘Come in; baby’s awake, and Mrs. Murray much better to-day. Introduce me.’

‘Burleigh of the civil service, an old ship-mate of mine—Captain Murray.’

The trio walked inside.

Mrs. Murray’s elegant figure was reclining gracefully in an easy chair, while her fingers were occupied with some fancy work, such as is usually seen in the hands of ladies who have a young baby to make pretty caps for. A work-basket stood on the table; an open book turned down flat on its face, and a second easy chair in close proximity to the table, and opposite Mrs. Murray, plainly showed the domestic duties the husband had been engaged in, viz., reading aloud while his wife was working. A little distance off was a group of three natives, two ayahs and one bearer, engaged in taking care of a little child apparently about three months old. The room was comfortably, even handsomely furnished, for Captain Murray was commanding a regi-

ment of irregular cavalry, the 19th, the right wing of which was stationed at Islamabad.

A desultory conversation was kept up for a few minutes, about the weather, and comparisons were hazarded between the heat this year and last, and the prospect of a favourable season to come, when the harmony of the party and the interest of the conversation were suddenly interrupted by the child's bursting into a loud fit of crying; and so great was the perturbation of both mamma and papa at the occurrence of this untoward event, that Burleigh and Graham deemed it best to take themselves off.

They were proceeding steadily down the road after leaving Captain Murray's house, when their attention was attracted by the sound of 'tomtoming' or beating of native drums, shouting, chattering, singing, and other indications of the approach of a native procession: immediately afterwards a large crowd of natives gaudily and fantastically dressed, some mounted on camels, some on horses, and one more conspicuous than the rest, on an elephant with showy trappings, appeared from a turn in the road advancing with little order or regularity. Burleigh's horse, Jimmy, as it was called, exhibited manifest signs of displeasure and consternation, which increased as they

approached the disorderly rabble in front of them.

‘Jimmy will never stand all this, if these fellows don’t keep quiet or get out of the way,’ said Burleigh, getting a little anxious. ‘I wonder this sort of thing is allowed in cantonments.’

There was a deep ditch on either side of the road, which was, however, broad enough to allow a carriage or buggy to pass any ordinary impediment with ease and safety to all parties.

‘I never saw such a thing before,’ replied Graham, making at the same time signs to the natives to get out of the way.

The horse became momentarily more restive, swerving first to one side, then the other.

‘Keep his head straight.’

‘I can’t,’ said Burleigh.

‘Keep quiet, you brutes!’ shouted Graham, in Hindustani.

It was too late: with a bound and a scream, Jimmy, with the bit between his teeth, dashed off to one side of the road, in spite of the driver’s efforts to restrain him. The groom, who was running behind, let go his hold, and made a frantic and unsuccessful effort to get at the animal’s head. The natives, instead of making way to allow the vehicle to pass, or restraining their untimely clamour, raised a

loud shout, half of derision, half defiance. This completed the business, and the next instant the buggy and horse had come to in the ditch, the former fairly upset, and the latter plunging, kicking, and struggling in his vain efforts to disentangle himself from the broken harness.

Graham was thrown clear off the concern into the road, and would have been severely injured by the fall, had he not been shot right into the arms of a fat native, who subsided beneath the blow, and formed an animated cushion upon which the young officer alighted harmlessly and unscathed.

Burleigh was less fortunate, for he was found by his friend, who went immediately to his assistance, lying insensible and bleeding in the ditch, with his arm beneath the buggy step. The mob of natives who had caused this catastrophe offered no assistance, but seemed, at last, awestruck into silence. With the groom's help, Graham extracted Burleigh from his perilous position; consciousness speedily returned, and a hasty examination showed that, though much bruised, cut, and bleeding, he had no bones broken. The groom and Graham then proceeded to unfasten the harness and release Jimmy, who did not appear to relish his share of the disaster any more than

his master. Burleigh was too much bruised and shaken to be of any use, and sat down on the side of the road. The mob, after a short respite, recommenced the clamour afresh, which increased Jimmy's discomfiture considerably : and as they passed Burleigh, one of the natives near him, seeing that he was bleeding, called out to the rest, 'The first Feringhee blood;' an observation which elicited shouts of laughter from the rest. Burleigh watched them as they went by, astonished at the extraordinary disrespect evinced in their behaviour, and endeavouring to impress upon his memory the features of those that passed nearest him, so as to be able to recognise them.

The harness was too much broken to allow of Jimmy being put in again ; so the two friends betook themselves to Capt. Murray's bungalow, where they rested, and then drove home in his dog-cart.



## CHAPTER II.

THE military station of Islamabad was situated, as is usually the case in India where troops are located in the immediate neighbourhood of large cities for the purpose of overawing the population, about two miles from the native town. The latter was a large and populous place, inhabited mostly by Musulman merchants, tradesmen, artisans, &c., and surrounded by a succession of gardens and handsome buildings, belonging to the different Nawabs or Mahometan gentlemen, whose ancestors had possessed property in that neighbourhood ever since the days of the Moghul dynasty, and who had been confirmed in all their rights and privileges by the British Government when the country had passed into its hands. The mode of life passed by these Indian gentlemen was very much what we should expect to see in men situated, as they are, with no intellectual resources to while away the time, no regular employment of any kind, and no lack of all those means of

enjoyment and Oriental luxuries for which the East is so notorious. The greater part of them spent their time in the 'Zenana,' or in lounging about their gardens, occasionally relieving the monotony of such an existence by the amusement of the chase or hawking. Those who wished to exert themselves sought and easily obtained employment under government, as deputy magistrates or subordinate officers connected with the administration of justice, but to the generality these duties entailed too great mental application, and interfered too much with that easy sensual style of life so highly prized by Asiatics. A few of the more refined and better educated amused themselves by listening to the works of Persian authors, which were read aloud to them by men retained in their service for the purpose; and several of the native newspapers published in one or two of the principal cities in Northern India and Bengal, under the high-flowing titles of the 'Star of Islam,' the 'Well-wisher of India,' the 'Indian Patriot,' &c., whose columns generally teemed with seditious sentiments and treasonable expressions against the British government, found their way into the houses of these gentlemen, and were listened to with great attention.

The early morning was generally devoted

by the class of men I speak of to whatever out-of-door exercise they deemed it advisable or felt it convenient to take; the middle of the day was spent in sleep; and when the sultry heat of noon had somewhat abated, the degenerate descendants of the Moghul conquerors of Hindustan might be seen dressed in light flowing robes, reclining listlessly upon their carpets, enjoying their pipes and chatting together on the common topics of the day; others remained alone and indoors; and while the ever-present hooka filled the apartment with its fragrant scent, a 'Munshi,' squatted on the ground at a respectable distance from the master of the house, read aloud in a sing-song voice and in a nasal twang the melodious couplets of Hafiz or Sadi, or the more stirring tales recorded by the fluent pen of Firdousi. The cooler hours of evening were spent in the 'Zenana,' or in wandering under the orange and lime trees which were planted on each side of the straight rectangular garden paths so fashionable in the eyes of native horticulturists, and so unsightly in our own.

Although the greater proportion of the inhabitants of Islamabad were Mussulmans, there were, as a matter of course, among the 120,000 beings that thronged its crowded

streets and populated suburbs, a great many Hindoos of all classes, castes, and families. They were mostly those engaged in trade and petty shopkeeping: a few wealthy partners of the great native Indian bankers of Benares occupied a lofty and well-built edifice in the finest part of the town, and the Hindoo religion was fairly represented by a fine temple and college of priests adjoining, built outside the city, in a grove where the wide-spreading mango, the elegant pine, and the broad-leaved plaintain, combined with their variegated and rich foliage to afford a picturesque and shady resort to the lazy Brahmins and deluded votaries of Mahadeo, who daily repaired to the spot in crowds.

The principal person, however, in the native society, was, as he was called *par excellence*, the Nawab of Islamabad. His name was Zeinat-ul-abadeen, which signifies the 'ornament of the worshippers.' The greater part of the city and of the surrounding district belonged to this nobleman, whose father had been indebted to the British government for deciding in his favour a lawsuit of many years' standing with a rival claimant to the greater part of the estate, and for supporting that decision by a military demonstration, rendered necessary by the vigorous and spirited opposition

shown by the ex-Nawab Moozuffer-ood-deen, an adventurer, who having nothing to lose and everything to gain by putting forward a false claim, and supporting it by evidence, which is always to be purchased in India, was at one time very nearly winning the case; but the cunning of the Asiatic was in this instance no match for the skill and tact of the English judges. The worthlessness of the evidence being detected, a decree was given against the claimant, and afterwards confirmed by the decision of the superior tribunal. The adventurer, disgusted at what he chose to consider injustice, and with his character stamped as an impostor, retired from public life, and, selling off what remained to him of his property, took his departure for Mecca.

The present Nawab was a young nobleman of five and twenty years of age, and in intelligence, activity, and good sense, very far superior to the rest of the native gentlemen around. His large property gave him some employment, and although all details were managed by subordinates, the mere fact of superintending their labour and looking over accounts occasionally gave him, what his friends in the neighbourhood had not, at any rate, nominal employment. He had, however, but little taste for duties of this kind. De-

barred by prejudice and pride from taking military service under the British government, he contented himself by indulging a natural predilection for military display in drilling a small force of about 200 armed retainers, whom he was permitted to keep up as a kind of militia, and who were withdrawn from their fields and homes once or twice a year, to live in camp and swell the retinue of their chief, when he made a tour on his estate.

The Nawab of Islamabad, it will readily be believed, was a man of great consequence in the country. He had great influence among the Mahometan population, and could raise, if occasion required, a very considerable force. The attachment of influential chiefs it has unfortunately not always been the object of the British government to gain, for it has too often overlooked the fact that the good-will and fidelity of the native aristocracy would be the surest bulwark of its power. But there were many exceptional cases to the general rule, and it had always been an object with the chief civil magistrate of Islamabad to cultivate the acquaintance of the Nawab, and that nobleman's fondness for English society, and apparent desire to ingratiate himself with English residents of all classes, as well as the acknowledged debt of gratitude he owed to the

British government for his present position, all combined to point him out as one of the most staunch supporters of the power of the East India Company to be found in the whole of Hindustan.

With the officers, quartered at Islamabad, the Nawab was a general favourite. Was a tiger-hunting expedition proposed, a note from the magistrate would procure the ready offer of the Nawab's elephants, and he himself not unfrequently made one of the party: was a picnic to be given, the Nawab's gardens were at the disposal of the party: and about twice a year he was in the habit of giving a fête to which the European officers and ladies were invited, where they feasted on cold turkeys and champagne, under the marble alcoves in the gardens, while fountains played around them, and sweet-scented flowers filled the air with fragrance.

About the time I have chosen for the opening of my story, one of these fêtes took place, and all the English residents at Islamabad received invitations. The Nawab's residence, to which the gardens where the fête was to be given were attached, was at the farther side of the city. A large and handsome gateway admitted the visitor into the garden, the full extent of which, however, could not be seen

from the entrance. A straight broad path, flanked by square borders for flowers, and regular rows of orange and pomegranate trees, led from the gateway to a large and elegantly shaped summer-house built chiefly of marble, decorated in the inside with mosaics of various colours and patterns: from the floor of the building your eye could wander over the whole expanse of the garden, except where the sight was bounded by the trees, whose rich green foliage contrasted prettily with the light flowering shrubs now in full blossom. There were two or three marble reservoirs full of water, the largest of which was situated immediately beneath the summer-house, and in most of them fountains were playing. The only arrangement that displeased the eye accustomed to a display of European horticultural taste, were the straight paths, the square flower-beds, and the exact regularity with which the lines, whether of shade, trees, masonry, or gravel walks, intersected one another at a right angle. Besides the principal building there were several other smaller summer-houses, built all expressly on the same model, the same architecture (size being the only quality varied), the same pattern mosaics, the same bright dazzling whiteness about them all. In the central building there was a table



covered with a white cloth, upon which all the delicacies of European and Asiatic taste were placed in a strange proximity, but with the utmost profusion. Plates and knives and forks were also there, and chairs for the guests to sit upon: a band of four or five table domestics, clad in snow-white garments, stood here and there ready to do the honours, and indeed the most fastidious connoisseur might be sure to find something to suit his taste. A dish of fruit would be flanked by tins of preserved oysters on one side, and hermetically-sealed lobsters on the other; a cold turkey confronted by a small mountain of 'pillaos;' flat dishes of jelly and blancmange were surrounded by bottles of chutney and jars of preserved Indian fruits; while the interstices of the table were covered with plates of roasted pistachio nuts, almonds in their shell, white unwholesome-looking sweetmeats of native, and boxes of bonbons of European, manufacture, dishes of oranges, apples from Cabul and Cashmere, and dried raisins. A miscellaneous mass of black bottles stood on another table at the side, exhibiting the native ideas of English powers of absorption, and consisting of champagne, beer, Guinness' stout, port, claret, sherry, burgundy, so that if the guests were inclined to promiscuous drinking they might have ample means

of gratifying their inclination, and doing justice to the somewhat barbaric hospitality of the generous host.

By the cool of the evening, for the hot winds had not yet set in, the guests began to arrive: officers in gay uniform, ladies dressed in all the colours of the rainbow and bonnets of the newest fashion (newest, that is, in Islamabad, where fortunately for husbands no milliner with fashions direct from Paris had as yet ventured to take up her abode), wandered in groups of twos and threes along the garden paths. One scarcely knew which to admire most, the flowers of animate or inanimate nature. Pretty faces smiling from beneath pretty bonnets, the light colours of the dresses of the ladies, whose graceful figures appeared here and there from amid the jessamine and pomegranate trees and beds of flowers of every hue, the merry laugh that rang through the air, the sound of musical voices full of youthful mirth and gaiety, mingled with the noisier strains that came from the band which was playing in a distant part of the garden, the refreshing sound of splashing water from a hundred fountains that were in action in the reservoirs, the sweet scents that floated in the air—all served to enchant the senses, and make young hearts,

and older ones too, as to that matter, forget for the time that there was anything more serious in life to be attended to than ladies' smiles, and music, and love, and flowers.

So may we mortals stand on dangerous ground, giving ourselves up to the fleeting pleasure of life, when a precipice, all unseen, yawns at our very feet.

Among the guests were Colonel and Mrs. Wetherall, and their guest, Captain and Mrs. Stevens, and Miss Leslie, and close after them came the two friends, Graham and Burleigh; the former gazing at the young girl in front of him with such an eager glance, as if he longed to kiss the ground she walked upon: and indeed she did look very pretty; her figure tall and graceful, though not too slender; her rich auburn hair and blue eyes, and delicate colour of her cheek, rivalling the tint of the budding rose; the row of pearl-like teeth that peeped now and then from between the thin delicately turned lips when they opened temptingly to laugh: the grace of her slightest movement, and the queen-like dignity with which she moved along, hanging on her brother's arm, enchanted Arthur, who had long worshipped his goddess at a distance to such an extent that he felt inclined to disregard the conventionalities of society alto-

gether, and, throwing himself at her feet, to declare before the astonished eyes of the bystanders his unalterable and undying passion. There was Dr. Mactartan, a Scotchman, who knew everything almost about everybody, and made it the business of his life to find out anything he did not know. Then came Captain and Mrs. Murray, and the baby, who was put to sleep, and left with the ayah in an alcove in a retired part of the garden, whither Captain and Mrs. Murray, with a truly parental solicitude for their first-born, repaired regularly every twenty minutes to see how the 'little sweet' was getting on, the same 'little sweet' being a fair complexioned pretty child, dressed nicely in lace and ribbons, lying asleep in the tawny arms of a hideous black ayah, and looking very like a diminutive beauty with the beast. Then came Captain Scott, glad to get a holiday from his slatternly wife and untidy uncomfortable home, and Mrs. Williams, equally delighted that her gallant husband being on duty, she was forced to enjoy herself alone, and lose for a few hours of one day, at all events, the sound of his grumbling scolding voice. Then came—but time will not allow me to recount the names and qualities of all the illustrious guests that assembled to do honour

to the hospitality of the Nawab of Islamabad.

‘Come,’ said Arthur to his friend, when he had silently feasted his eyes on the form of his enslaver, ‘let me introduce you to the nicest people at Islamabad.’

‘Who?’

‘You shall see; we will take this turning to the left, and so we shall get round and meet them, instead of keeping up a chase in open ground.’

Slightly quickening their pace, and taking two or three turnings, one to the left and then to the right, they emerged upon the path they had left a little lower down, and so confronted the party Arthur was in quest of. They stopped, and Graham introduced his friend. While the group were occupied in the commonplace conversation of new acquaintances, Graham, offering his arm to Miss Leslie, proposed escorting her to another part of the garden, where a ‘tank’—as we unpoetically call it—or reservoir, of peculiar architectural beauty, was one of the sights of the place, and served as an excuse for Arthur to separate his fair friend from her companions for a time. Receiving an injunction to meet again at the central building in half an hour, Miss Leslie put her hand in Graham’s arm,

and the two walked away together. A slight smile curled upon Burleigh's lip as he followed the retiring figures with his eyes. 'So, my friend,' he thought, 'you have introduced me to very pleasant people, quite disinterestedly, no doubt.' Burleigh was much pleased with the first impressions of Mrs. Stevens and her husband, and accompanied them in their sauntering walk through the garden.

Novels are supposed to be representations of real life. I generally find, when a scene between two lovers is described, that the conversation flows glibly on both sides. The gentleman, eloquent and pathetic; the lady, sympathising and attentive. Poor Graham's case was a very desperate one. He had somehow mustered up courage to get Miss Leslie away from her party, which was the first step in a wonderfully well laid scheme he had all ready cut and dry. Unfortunately he overestimated his own powers. He had not gone more than a few yards with his fair companion before he began to wonder how in the world he had had the courage to take even the first step; and, as for carrying out his well-formed intentions and making all those pretty speeches he thought were ready at the tip of his tongue, why he could as soon fly. Love is generally represented blind; she often deserves

to be called dumb also. As long as she is only dumb and blind, we poor mortals can manage to rub on; but should she unhappily ever turn out deaf as well, what shall we do?

I do not pretend to lay bare the secrets of the lady's heart, though I have been less scrupulous with the gentleman. But if Miss Leslie reciprocated in any degree the feelings entertained towards her by her companion, she was on this occasion particularly perverse and crotchety. Perhaps she was in a bad humour about something; ladies do sometimes get out of humour. Perhaps she was annoyed with his shyness, for it is very irritating to have a tête-à-tête with a shy person. Besides, he pays you such a bad compliment; he must think you a very suspicious character, or that you have something bad about you, or that you are always necessarily thinking ill of others, or else he would not be afraid of you. Whatever the cause may have been, Miss Leslie was rather hard upon her silent lover, and twitted and teased him rather unmercifully, as young ladies sometimes will do, with dry sarcastic little speeches. Graham grew worse and worse; he thought she was ridiculing him, and that he could not stand. He was smarting under the disagreeable feeling that he had made a most egregious failure, and

mentally resolved that for the future he would count upon himself in anything rather than doing what is called 'making love'—though for my own part I am inclined to think the process is generally carried best at odd times, and by chance opportunities, and that when anyone settles down to it as to a task to be done, albeit a pleasant one, he generally finds he succeeds as badly as did Graham on the present occasion. Heartily glad was he for an excuse to conclude their tête-à-tête, and re-join the rest of the party; though he was in a terribly cross humour with himself, for he put down his failure to his own awkwardness and shyness and stupidity, and called himself to himself 'an ass' a great many more times that evening than he would have liked it to be known.

Things, however, were destined to be worse before they grew any better, for no sooner had they joined the others than Burleigh's advances were received most favourably.

He placed himself next her at the table at which the company all seated themselves to do honour to the splendid repast provided for them by the liberality of their host. She took up with him directly, talked and chatted sensibly enough in a free and comfortable manner that showed how much she was at her ease.



All this made Graham more and more cross; and the deeper grew his gloom and moodiness, the brighter and merrier became Miss Leslie. At last he took refuge in desperation. He was determined to abjure ladies' society henceforth: it was not worth a man's while to make himself miserable about such fickle creatures; it was the same old story to be told over again: young heart's affections ruined and blasted on account of filthy lucre. Burleigh was a good match—he, Graham, was a bad; when he was a full blown captain on his five hundred rupees a month, Burleigh would most likely be a full blown magistrate on his two thousand; and what comparison was there here?—‘but Amy, his adored Amy—he did think she had a soul above a money-bag.’

As soon as the collation was over Stevens touched Arthur lightly on the shoulder, and proposed in a pantomime that they should adjourn to smoke a cheroot. Arthur sulkily acquiesced. He would have preferred the ladies' society certainly, that is, under other circumstances; but now he would commence his practice of philosophy, and show Amy that if her heart was free, his was no less so.

As soon as they had lighted their cigars, and had seated themselves on a rustic bench under a mango tree, Stevens began to address his astonished companion in this wise.

‘I asked you to come away thus ungallantly, Graham, from the ladies, because I want to speak to you. I am not blind, my good fellow, at least not quite, and I want to caution you against a danger you are running into, I think. I allude to my sister-in-law.’

Arthur hardly knew how to receive the communication: in his present mood he was most inclined to take anything angrily, and so he almost voluntarily allowed a spirit of ill-temper to assert its sway within.

‘I cannot understand your allusion, Stevens,’ he replied with forced calmness. ‘I suppose you do not mean to insinuate that I have behaved towards Miss Leslie in any objectionable way.’

‘Not in the least, my dear Graham; that is not the point——’

‘What the deuce is, then?’ said the other interruptingly.

‘Why, simply this, Arthur—but do not get annoyed. I am merely doing what I believe to be a duty, and from that, depend upon it, no browbeating or angry behaviour of any man will frighten me. I wish to be on good terms with you always, for I admire and respect you, as I do that brave old soldier your father; so if you choose to quarrel with me I shall be sorry, but it can’t be helped.’

Graham remained silent, and the other continued—

‘I believe you have allowed yourself to become attached to my sister. She has nothing in the world to bring to the man that marries her, and as a subaltern it is out of the question your becoming her husband. I know well enough what poverty is, and to what utter misery and extinction of all mutual respect and affection it leads, and my sister will not marry anyone who has not what we consider a competency. I intend to retire from the service very soon; and as we are going away in a week or two, and shall very probably not return to Islamabad again, I thought it better to warn you, lest you should make yourselves both unhappy to no purpose. Amy’s ideas coincide with mine—so do my wife’s, and we do not think a lieutenant’s pay a sufficient income for an officer to marry on.’

‘In fact, Burleigh, you find a more eligible match,’ said Graham bitterly, rising as he spoke. ‘Good afternoon, Captain Stevens; I shall act on your kind and straightforward advice.’ So saying, with a stress upon the last word but one, Arthur Graham made a formal bow, and, with a look which he felt ought to have consumed Captain Stevens to ashes on the spot, walked leisurely away.

## CHAPTER III.

HE had scarcely gone out of sight when Mr. Dacres, the commissioner, came up, also indulging in the luxury of a post-prandial cheeroot.

‘Ha ! Stevens,’ he said, accosting that officer, ‘so you are doing the same as I—selfishly absenting yourself from the rest: suppose, as we are both misanthropes or rather misogynists for the present, we join company and take a stroll together; the truth is, I want to speak to you, and cannot have a better opportunity.’

‘Willingly, my dear sir,’ was Captain Stevens’s response, as he arose and joined him.

‘Hark ! there is the band striking up; they are going to dance. You and I, Stevens, are too old for such follies—eh?’

‘I am sorry Mrs. Dacres is not here to enjoy the scene; it would have amused her. I hope your last accounts from home—home we always call it—are good.’

‘Excellent. Thank God, she and my dear children are anywhere but here,’ he added

after a pause, speaking so earnestly that his tone and manner startled his companion.

‘What? you don’t mean to say, Dacres, then, that you believe all the reports that are about, and think there is any real danger threatening us? I haven’t seen you for the last ten days—when we last talked on public affairs you didn’t appear to consider matters were so serious; for my part, I have too much to do to think about it at all, but I hope to get away soon.’

‘Yes, somebody said you were going away next week.’

‘I was thinking of it, but I got a large batch of fresh work in this morning that will keep me here some time longer. I’ve got my leave, though.’

‘Well, I really think you are wise to get away—mind, I speak in confidence, don’t repeat what I say; I have had some bad news since I saw you last. I believe we are on the eve of a disturbance—things don’t look nice; the political horizon is not clear, as the newspaper phrase is—there are clouds gathering and signs in the heavens that portend something, I can hardly tell what. I have thought so long, and now the news we get day after day confirms me in my views.’

‘Yes, I agree with you; there are causes

for apprehension, and so there always must be as long as we hold the position we do in India; but there can be no doubt surely that we have much in our favour: in the event of any great movement, the bulk of the population, at any rate the better classes, and probably the majority of the native army, are attached to us; so that although disturbances may take place, which are always to be looked for in a country like this, there is no reason for doubting the final issue.'

'Indeed I must differ from you there; the attachment of the population and the fidelity of our native soldiery, and the loyalty of the better classes, are all empty words, which Englishmen use partly because they sound well, and partly because it flatters their national vanity, and partly because they fear, like a prodigal, to examine closely their accounts, and see how they really stand with regard to India. I have had as much experience as most men, and as many opportunities of judging, and I fearlessly assert that these notions and sources of security are all unsound. Instead of being beloved we are hated, instead of being respected we are despised, only we are feared too: instead of being trusted we are looked upon with the greatest suspicion. All classes, high and low, hate us: the low, be-

cause among them it is we who get the credit of all the tyranny and oppression and misrule that goes on, and which in reality is the work of our native subordinates, but you can't get the common people to believe it. The higher classes naturally detest us, as occupying the position they would fill if we were not here. And how miserably do we Englishmen set about courting popularity!—Popularity did I say? why, if we look at the behaviour of nine Englishmen out of ten in the country towards the natives, we might suppose their object was to make themselves as unpopular as possible.'

'There is much truth in all you say, but does our prestige go for nothing—our moral and physical superiority, the weight of character?'

'I think Lord Dalhousie's policy has done a great deal towards destroying the confidence which was formerly placed in us. Our prestige and so on, really, depends upon the fidelity or otherwise of a huge overgrown monster of a mercenary army, who, if they chose to act unanimously against us, might in one day destroy every vestige of our race in India.'

'And is this what you anticipate?'

'Not immediately. I believe the first intimation of danger we get, will be a general outbreak among the native troops; but this will be only the initiative, the first stone

thrown from the mouth of the volcano that has been preparing for an eruption for years: it is a vast popular movement that I dread, dangerous at any time and anywhere, but when accompanied by the simultaneous defection of, perhaps, a hundred and fifty thousand disciplined mercenary troops, absolutely fearful to contemplate.'

'Well, Dacres, you have had more experience than I, but I don't believe that the sepoys would ever be unanimous in wanting to throw away all the advantages they enjoy in our service, their regular pay, their pensions, and prospects—think you they are mad enough to cast them to the winds? Again, how could the Mahometans and Hindoos ever combine to act together?—they hate one another more than they can be supposed to hate us, Christians though we are.'

'Yes, when the time comes there will scarcely be a man found faithful to us: you forget in talking about the strength of our hold upon them by pensions, pay, &c., that the whole fabric is thrown to the ground the moment the belief in the overthrow of our empire takes possession of men's minds: of what value to them is a claim on the support of a government that is doomed?—why should they make a sacrifice to give them a claim to



the favour of a power whose race is run, whose time is drawing to a close, which they believe ours to be, on the faith of prophecies and traditions industriously circulated among them? The annexation of Oude was the most dishonest as it was the most disastrous policy ever pursued by any government, and we shall reap the fruits of it ere long. While Oude was independent we had a hold upon our native army—now we have none.’

‘But the officers——’

‘Are deceived—all deceived—blind, infatuated. Perhaps it is only to be expected they should be so; they are told from the day they enter the service to gain the affections of their men, and this they cannot do without showing and having confidence in them, but I am afraid they will be rudely awakened from their dream some day. One thing, however, is clear, that if my worst anticipations are realised, we shall all be obliged to stand at bay and act independently at every station and outpost, which we must defend with our wives and families till succour reaches us from home. So firmly convinced do I feel that something of the sort is about to happen, that I have thought over the subject, and determined upon a plan of action in case things come to the worst, and I want your opinion

as an engineer upon this spot, as a military post do you think it is tenable?’

‘It might be made so certainly,’ replied Captain Stevens, standing and casting a leisurely glance round him—‘that is, provided we were secure from treachery within, and had a trustworthy force to garrison it—but may I ask, are your views confined to yourself alone, or are they shared in by the government?’

‘The government is fully aware that there is something amiss, a screw loose in the machine of state; this I know from the replies to letters I have deemed it my duty to write on the state of public affairs: but there is too much routine and red tape, and want of reliance on individual energy, for the Indian government easily to appreciate its position, or to extricate itself from difficulties, and I must say the late exhibition of weakness we have seen in Calcutta is not calculated to encourage one. But you spoke of treachery within.’

‘Yes—if the state of things is as you describe—if those who have most cause to trust us, and to remain staunch to our government, are likely to prove our worst enemies in the end, I see nothing to be gained by protracting a contest which must result in

our speedy and inevitable annihilation. We, the mere handful of Englishmen at Islamabad, can never garrison a place like this, and the Nawab—for of course you would not think of coming here against his will and wish—why should he be more favourable to us than the sepoys who have eaten our salt for years, and their fathers and grandfathers before them?’

‘As far as I can trust any Asiatic, I trust the Nawab; but recollect my confidence in him is only a matter of comparison. He might turn against us, but in the event which I am pretending to anticipate, the defection of the native army, we have absolutely no alternative; we must throw ourselves upon the Nawab; he has a small force tolerably efficiently armed and drilled—his men are, we know, personally attached to him, and though I would not give a fig for him or his men as allies to act against the sepoys, supposing they rebelled, I think it is not unlikely they might exert themselves to protect us—at any rate for a time—all would depend on how affairs elsewhere turned out.’

‘Have you ever sounded him on the subject?’

.. ‘To a certain extent I have. Of course it would be an awkward question to put to him

direct, but he himself introduced the subject one day. We were alone, and he turned suddenly round and said, "Sahib! you English are extraordinary people: you walk about, eat, drink, and sleep in a magazine of gun-powder." "How so?" I replied, and he went on to say that there was a great deal going on among the Mahometans under the surface which might result in serious consequences. He told me, among other things, that a friend of his who had just returned from Mecca had informed him that the subject of our expected destruction in India was openly and freely discussed by all the Mussulmans at Mecca, and by the crowds both going and coming. They have prophecies and traditions, all pointing to the present and few succeeding years as pregnant with great events in the Mahometan world, and the first of the series of events is to be, according to them, our expulsion from India, or destruction in it, and the establishment of a Mahometan dynasty in the throne of the Moguls.'

'And what view did the Nawab take of it himself?'

'Why, it is difficult to read an Asiatic's countenance. He hardly knows, I think, what to believe; like the rest of us, he feels that something is about to happen, but has neither

made up his mind what to expect, or what course to pursue.'

'For a native he is a well-educated man, I believe, and has liberal and extended views.'

'Very much so, and it is to his good sense I trust to act, if I cannot say, in a loyal, yet in a friendly manner towards us, in the event of any great disturbance taking place. He owes his present position entirely to the British government, but I don't think so much of that as a motive for good behaviour as of his knowledge of the power and resources of Great Britain. A man in his circumstances we may be sure will stick to the winning side; if affairs go well for us, he will be true—if not, I would not give that' (snapping his finger and thumb) 'for his fidelity or assistance.'

The conversation was here interrupted by a native servant, called in India a chuprassie, who came up with a note and a card, and after making a low salaam, put them in Mr. Dacres's hand. The latter looked at the card, then at the address of the letter, and without further delay opened it and read.

'Is the gentleman here?' he asked, speaking to the servant.

'The sahib is there,' said the man, pointing in the direction of the gate.

'Go and give him my salaam, and say I am

waiting to see him. 'Come along,' added the speaker, as the servant hastened away on his errand, 'here is a visitor come to see us, and take notes—a real live member of parliament—Mr. what's his name—Thurston. See the card, Mr. T. Thurston, an M.P. My friend writes from Calcutta, asking me to do the needful.'

'Quite an event for our quiet little society at Islamabad.'

By the time they had got half-way up the garden walk, they met the stranger coming down, following the chuprassie.

He was a middle-aged man, apparently, nicely dressed, and looking, as far as externals could decide the point, a thorough gentleman. The impression, however, the two friends gained from a distant view of his appearance became less favourable upon a closer inspection. There was a decidedly common-place look about the stranger's features, a vacant restless expression in his eyes, and that peculiar turn of lip that denotes obstinacy and a very tolerable opinion of oneself. His complexion was naturally dark, his features of a Jewish cast, and eyes brown. Had he dressed himself in native costume, he might have passed for an Affghan, or a Peshawur Jew.

'Happy to welcome you to our little sta-

tion,' said Mr. Dacres, slightly raising his hat, and then holding out his hand to confirm the welcome by a hearty shake, such as one gets from a hospitable Anglo-Indian of the old school—'let me introduce you to my friend Captain Stevens, of the Bengal Engineers—when did you arrive?'

'This morning, some hours ago. I went to the inn, or traveller's resting-house, which you people call a dâk bungalow, and afterwards to your house, where I learnt you were all down here holiday-keeping, so I followed.'

'Quite right—you will find a merry party here, and an excellent opportunity of making acquaintance with all our good people. You see an up-country station to advantage to-day, Mr. Thurston. You are travelling, my friend Watson tells me, for information—we must see that you get a good impression of us—first impressions are important.'

'Yes; I am anxious to pick up some information about India from personal observation, that may enable me to speak with authority, you know, on the great Indian question, when it comes before the House. Nothing like personal observation, after all, Mr. Dacres.'

'You shall see, then, that we have nothing to be ashamed of: however, to-day is devoted

to pleasure, not business; so come and let me introduce you to the ladies—it is not every day we have a real M.P. at Islamabad, I can tell you.'

This was said as a joke, but Mr. Thurston was one of those unhappy individuals we sometimes meet with, who never see a joke like other people: he took the remark as an intended compliment, excusing the vulgarity of it, in his own mind, by his ideas of Anglo-Indian barbarity; it was a compliment, however, and the flattery, though gross, was pleasing: he swelled with importance; and walked in the direction where several of the guests were assembled with a dignified and impressive air.

After being introduced to the ladies and most of the officers present about the grounds, and spending a few minutes in conversation with each group, at Mr. Dacres's invitation he accompanied him to the pavilion, where the cold collation was still on the table, to get refreshment. This was soon provided, and as he engaged in the all-important work of eating and drinking, he continued the conversation with his companion that had been broken off. Captain Stevens had remained behind, with his wife.

'You see, Mr. Dacres,' he said, sipping his



wine, 'the British public are sadly deficient in their knowledge of India: we get wrong impressions at home—in fact, we get no impressions at all but those we create ourselves. It is absolutely necessary to travel and see foreign countries with our own eyes. We are anxious, very anxious, to do something for India, to do something towards emancipating the native population from the political and social slavery they groan under. A glorious empire this, sir, a wonderful sight—a hundred and fifty millions held in subjection by opinion, by moral force; the world has never seen anything like it.'

'I hope you may not have cause to change your views with respect to that same moral force before you leave us,' replied Mr. Dacres; 'believe me, sir, when I tell you—and I am no chicken, but I speak with thirty years' experience at my back—this moral force and empire of opinion is all humbug.'

Mr. Thurston held his breath for a moment—'Anglo-Indian prejudices, narrow-minded civilian ideas—relics of social barbarity,' he said to himself; then added aloud,

'Indeed! I am sorry to hear you speak thus. I knew that such notions were entertained very much by the military—mostly illiterate men, devoted to their profession, but

caring for nothing beyond ; but I was not aware that gentlemen of your service, and of your position in the country, held them.'

'Why, I believe we are pretty much of the same way of thinking in these matters, Mr. Thurston; civilians and military men—and, I think, the majority of Englishmen who remain long in the country—come round to our opinion, after a practical acquaintance with the state of the country.'

'Ah! I am aware there is a vast amount of prejudice to work against, but I must see these things for myself, Mr. Dacres: for instance, I must enquire into the habits and customs of the natives, become acquainted with their time-honoured systems of religion; I must endeavour to look with the eye of a native upon the English government, read their thoughts, see how the system of government works, the administration of justice, the penal laws, the revenue, the land settlements, the practical results of the existing system of education, and the progress of the arts and sciences among the native community—and so on.'

'Information on these points is doubtless desirable. I suppose you intend to make some stay in the country?'

'Yes; I shall devote as much time as I can

possibly spare from other public duties to this interesting country. I suppose my absence from England will be extended certainly to six or seven months.'

Mr. Dacres knocked off the ash of a stump of a cheroot he was smoking, and prepared to light another. A slight smile played about the corners of his mouth.

'You will find an intimate knowledge of the language the greatest assistance to you in your enquiries.'

'Of course, without it my pursuit would be mere waste of time. I am most fortunate in this respect; having secured the services of a very intelligent, well-educated native, who travels about with me, and acts as interpreter, as well as instructor, during my leisure hours: he is a Mahometan of liberal views and a capacious mind, quite a superior kind of man.'

'You are fortunate; where did you find him?'

'I got him in Calcutta; he was introduced to me by a native gentleman, with whom I picked up an acquaintance accidentally.'

'Did my friend Watson recommend him?'

'Why no, he was rather prejudiced against the man; but, like many others, Watson has imbibed a great many what I call Anglo-Indian notions on these subjects, and does not

place that confidence in the natives about him, or treat them with that forbearance and consideration, that a gentleman in his position should do.'

'May I ask, if not impertinent, what remuneration you give this man for his services?'

'Oh, something merely nominal: he is actuated by motives far superior to any of a mere personal or mercenary nature. I told him my object in visiting the country, and he offered to attend me, merely for the sake of being useful, and aiding me in the investigation that he is fully aware will tend to the benefit of his country and his race. I pay all his travelling expenses, and allow him ten pounds a month—a hundred rupees—while he accompanies me, a trifling sum to a gentleman of his position and importance; indeed, I should have been ashamed to offer it, but that I knew, from personal acquaintance with Asiatics in other countries, that no Oriental is above taking money when offered.'

As the evening was now drawing in, and the sun had set, Mr. Dacres arose and proposed joining the rest of the party before it became dark, when a grand display of fireworks was to close the festivities.

## CHAPTER IV.

WE must turn from the picture of fêtes, gardens full of bright flowers, and lovely women, gay parties and merry dancing, to the darker side of nature, secret conspiracy, black ingratitude and infernal treachery.

While the English community at Islamabad were amusing themselves in the way I have attempted to describe, a select portion of the natives were engaged in deep and serious business. The reader must accompany me to the lines of the 75th Native Infantry. For the benefit of those who are ignorant of what native 'lines' are like, it will be necessary to say a few words in explanation. They consisted then at Islamabad of ten double rows of mud huts placed back to back in straight lines, the partition wall running right through the centre from one end to the other: the walls were of mud or bricks baked in the sun, and plastered over—the roofs thatched with dry grass and bamboos; the huts were about eight or ten feet square, the roof sloping

towards the front; those at each end of the row were higher, larger and better built than the rest, and allotted to native commissioned officers. There was a line of trees planted a few feet in front of the huts, and many of the men had amused themselves in their leisure hours by making small gardens before their doors. This collection of dwellings was intersected by two broad centre roads at right angles to each other, and two other narrower roads parallel to the great centre one which ran through the lines from right to left. Two or three large peepul-trees here and there with their thick foliage and widely-spreading branches afforded a grateful shade during the heat of the day, and a resting-place for innumerable crows during the night.

One night after the party in the Nawab's garden, a gathering took place in the house of one of the native officers of the 75th Native Infantry. It would not have been an easy matter for a stranger to have gained admittance to that assembly, for two men, sepoys in their native dress, were constantly on the watch outside. Whenever any one approached, they called out and challenged the intruder, as if they had been sentries on duty. Colonel Wetherall had given very strict orders to his men against moving about in the lines during

the night, and every man detected in doing so was reported at once to the native officer of the day, and by him to the adjutant and commanding officer the following morning. These orders had been lately enforced with great severity, at the urgent representation of some of the senior native officers, who had doubtless good reasons for wishing all the men to remain in their own huts during the night, and who had accordingly told the colonel that unless this rule was strictly carried out, they could not be answerable for the conduct of the men in the lines. It is not to be wondered at, therefore, that on the night in question (and it need not be specified for how many nights before) the sentries in undress had not to challenge a single person who was not acquainted with the watchword or private parole of the conspirators; for I will not disguise from my readers that I am about to admit them into some of the arcana of that tremendous plot which had well-nigh insured the destruction of our boasted empire in the East. The parole was given in a whisper to the sentry, who immediately let the visitor pass; but, to avoid any chance of treachery or deception, he had no sooner reached the door of the hut and entered, than he felt the iron grasp of a strong mus-

cular hand upon him, and before he advanced a step farther he was required to give the second watchword, 'Ek deen' (*Anglicè*, One faith). This proof of complicity afforded, he was allowed to enter an inner apartment, when, after looking for a short time till his eyes became accustomed to the gloom and the feeble light within, that scarce served to render anything visible, he might distinguish the forms of several men seated on their haunches on the ground. One or two hookas were at work, and occasionally passed from hand to hand among those who were permitted by the arbitrary laws of caste to indulge in a community of pipes. The only light thrown upon this dismal scene came from a small oil-lamp on a little wooden shelf in the wall about six feet from the ground. But, either accidentally or by design, the room was kept so dark that it would have been almost impossible for anyone to distinguish the features of any of its occupants with sufficient clearness to recognise or identify the owner of them. What little conversation was carried on was in an under tone: in fact, the dismal-looking creatures half obscured in the gloom of the apartment, seemed to be whispering or muttering to one another like spirits of evil intent on some business too dreadful



to be witnessed or heard by the outer world. The party inside the hut increased gradually till it amounted to fifteen men, all of whom came in one after the other and took their seats (if squatting on the ground can be called taking a seat) in silence.

At last a grey-haired old gentleman who was sitting under the lamp, and consequently completely enveloped in its shade, commenced the proceedings of the evening, by calling over in a low voice the names of those whose presence he expected. Finding there were no defaulters, he uttered, to English ear the somewhat remarkable phrase, 'Ram, Ram, Ram,' took a long and very deep pull at the hooka—so long that you would have thought it would never have stopped bubbling, and then putting it aside, looked up and addressed a man who sat near him in his own language. 'Now, Peer Khan—speak, brother.'

Peer Khan who was thus called upon to address the meeting was a tall fine Mussulman havildar, or sergeant: his hair was slightly tinged with grey, his features were handsome, and his broad chest and muscular arms marked him for a very Hercules. He was one of the best men in the regiment in all athletic sports, a particular favourite with

the officers, and especially with the colonel, who placed the most entire confidence in him. He was clever and ingenious, could read and write the Persian and Hindee character, was an excellent accountant, and understood English pretty well; a fact, however, which was studiously concealed from the knowledge of his officers. He was senior havildar and pay-sergeant of the grenadier company.

On the present occasion his proceedings were conducted with all the decorum and precision, and freedom from anything like undue haste, for which natives are so famous. He first of all wriggled about his body for a second, which operation resulted in the production from some part of his person or his clothes of a piece of old wax candle about three inches long: this he lighted and placed on the ground before him; he then took from somewhere underneath his garments a rude kind of pocket or account book, and after leisurely opening it as if there were no such invention as time in the world, or as if his life was to come to an end when the book was fairly opened, and he therefore felt anxious to postpone that consummation as long as he reasonably could, he at length concluded the operation, and taking out a small bundle of

papers written all over in very small but clear handwriting in the Persian character, he commenced to read.

I must act the part of interpreter to the reader as I go on, for the intelligence thus communicated was wrapt up in so many enigmatical expressions that its meaning would be unintelligible. There was a nickname for every individual mentioned, no officer being spoken of either by his proper designation or rank: the brigadier was called 'the Old Owl;' the commissioner, Mr. Dacres, 'the Hawk;' the colonel, 'the Lion,'—and so on; each metaphorical application being appropriately determined by some characteristic quality of the person named.

'Mahomed Bux says,' began the havildar, reading with no great fluency the first scrap of paper he took out of the bundle,—“The sahibs all went sight-seeing at the Nawab's garden the other day: the brigadier was there, and sat opposite the commissioner; the colonel was also there: the brigadier asked the commissioner, 'Do you think the agitation about the greased cartridges will spread?' the commissioner frowned, and the other was silent: the colonel said 'he wondered how many English soldiers would come out;' the commissioner said 'a lac, but he never talked of

such things while natives were present:’ so they were silent.”

‘ May Alla confound them in the lowest hell !

“ After dinner the commissioner walkèd with Captain Stevens [this officer was designated the Mistree or Mason] a long time: I could not hear all they said. Beware of the Hawk; he has spies everywhere, and knows many things. He talked much about fortifying the place.’ ”

‘ What place?’ asked one of the listeners.

‘ I don’t know,’ said Peer Khan, and continued reading, “ and not trusting some one, the writer does not know who—more at a future time—adieu.” ”

After reading this, Peer Khan proceeded quietly and stolidly to burn it, then taking out another scrap went on reading. ‘ Peer Ally says,—“ The brigade-major [who was called the Jackal] read some printed newspapers at breakfast-time this morning, and then said to his wife, if the sepoys and natives only knew their strength, they would turn us (the infidels) out of India in two days. He said the brigadier was a fool. The lady asked him if the sepoys would take the new cartridges without a disturbance: he said they had better do so, or they would be destroyed.” There is no more.’

A low murmur passed round the listening group at the conclusion, as Peer Khan burnt the paper: it soon died away, and the silence, in which you might have heard a pin drop, was resumed.

A third scrap was produced; its contents were short:

‘ Boodh Singh says,—“ Beware of the Hawk—he suspects.’ ”

This was destroyed like the rest, and another succeeded.

“ Captain Stevens and the ladies are going to the hills:” there is no more.’ On the reverse side was written, ‘ Captain Stevens said the sirkar (government) were going to build large barracks for European soldiers in every station.’

After this, several letters were produced that had come from a distance, for they had post-marks upon them. The first ran as follows: ‘ Toorab Khan, ressaldar of the —— Irregular Cavalry, at ——, to Peer Khan, havildar, grenadier company of the 75th Regiment, at Islamabad. May your health remain good! All is well here, the corn almost ripe for cutting. I have changed my horse, and so have the others you mentioned. The horses were worn out and not fit for work. What need of more?’

Several other letters were read of the same import, but it is needless to recount them here. It is evident that a vigorous correspondence was being kept up with distant stations, and in Islamabad itself such a system of espionage was maintained through the medium of domestic servants, that every word that was uttered by any of the officers, military or civil, even in the confidence of official intercourse or the privacy of domestic life, so far as it related to political questions or could be brought to bear on them, was immediately recorded. How long the conspirators might have sat in conclave it is not for me to say, for they were interrupted by the entrance of another visitor, who broke in somewhat abruptly upon the conference. At his entrance they all rose and made a deep salaam.

It was certainly not his dress which caused this expression of respect: that is, dress taken in the ordinary acceptation of the term; for clothes he had none, except a slender band of cloth round his middle, but his arms and neck were bedecked with a number of necklaces and bracelets made of nothing more precious apparently than wood. His thick dirty matted hair, full of dust and filth, stood upright upon his head, or hung straggling over his shoulders and temples in confusion:

his face and breast were plastered with a white or yellowish substance, the ashes of cow-dung, which gave a ghastly hue to his appearance. However, everything goes by comparison, and this gentleman's friends among whom he found himself could not have treated him more respectfully had he presented himself dressed in the newest fashion by Buckmaster or Stultz. The scantiness of clothing worn by their dignitary certainly displayed to the best advantage the symmetry of his form and the development of his muscular limbs. Altogether he was a character very well calculated to frighten a nervous old lady in a dark night.

He returned the salute made to him, and by a sign desired his friends to reseate themselves: some did so, others remained standing. The old gentleman first introduced as the head-man or president of the meeting betook himself to his hooka. 'Be prepared,' said the unknown, speaking in a loud whisper; 'all does not go well—the infidels are beginning too soon. I am in haste, and have many miles to ride before morning, for I am sent to warn all to be prepared, and not to wait for the signal that was before pointed out to you. As soon as you hear of fire and sword, up and be doing as ye may:

recollect, no life spared; the King will not receive you, unless you destroy all the infidels; this is a *jehad* (holy war). When you have taken the station, remain not more than two days, and then march.' So saying, the unknown left the hut: we may as well follow him.

Outside the cantonment, about half a mile from the lines, stood what is called a 'chauki' or post-house, a yard where the horses were kept for the mail-carts. At one corner of this yard there was a small hut or shanty, and just outside it, but on the opposite side of the road, grew a large wide-spreading peepul tree. Here, too, did the unknown keep his stable—at least it would seem so, for, on reaching the place, he found a horse ready saddled and accoutred, tied to a peg in the ground; he unfastened the rope, for there appeared to be no attendant near, twisted it round the animal's neck, leapt on its back, and striking it with a thong of leather that was attached to the saddle-bow, started off at full gallop in a south-east direction—the opposite one from Delhi.

The sound of the horse's hoofs had scarcely died away in the distance, when the figure of a man might have been seen cautiously descending from the branches of the wide-spreading peepul tree before mentioned; he alighted



quietly on the ground, cast a hasty glance around him, and then set off with long strides at a rapid pace across the plain in the direction of Mr. Dacres's house.

Hardly was he out of sight, however, before a third figure appeared upon the scene, this time emerging from the hut, and started off at the rate of full six miles an hour across the plain too—not in the same direction as the last, but in another, namely, towards the lines of the 75th Regiment. The first was hurrying to tell the commissioner that an emissary from the north had come in haste, visited the lines, returned, and sped on his way again, all within a quarter of an hour; and the second went at a double pace, to warn the conspirators that the emissary's arrival had been watched and reported by a man who had been hidden in a peepul tree. It was double the distance to Mr. Dacres's house that it was to the lines, and the second messenger ran as fast again as the first for a very good reason, because he had his heart in the affair in more ways than one. The night was sultry and hot, and before the first messenger went in to his employer when he reached the house, he called to a brother Hindoo of the same caste as himself to give him some water, for he was very thirsty. This man detained him

in conversation for a short time; before it was ended he was seized with violent vomiting and cramps; his fellow-servants gathered round him and carried him silently to his hut in the compound; in the agonies he suffered he called loudly and frequently for his master, and the man who had given him the water went away, as he promised, to report to him the sudden illness of his domestic, and solicit his attendance. The poor fellow waited and waited in vain, his master never made his appearance. His comrade left him as soon as he was too ill and weak to rise, and alone in the dark hut, untended, unsoothed by the attention of a single relation or friend, he lingered out the last agonised moments of his life. Next morning, for the first time, Mr. Dacres heard the news. The other servants, in reporting the man's death, said he had been bitten by a snake—he guessed what sort of fangs the snake had.

## CHAPTER V.

WHILE events were passing which ought to have made every officer, civil and military, who held any important post in India anxious for their result, Brigadier Cartwright, commanding at Islamabad, did not allow the daily routine of his life to be put out at all by any considerations of public or private danger. Brigadier Cartwright was one of those men of whom the rebellion has afforded some good specimens. Oh for the pen of a Dickens or a Thackeray to do them justice ! My feeble powers of description are all unequal to the task, still must I try to draw for my readers a portrait of Brigadier Cartwright, commanding at Islamabad.

He was an old man whose grey hairs might have entitled him to respect, had he not invariably worn a wig—a very bad one, still it was a wig; and if it did not make him look younger, it concealed the baldness of his head and the grey of his few remaining silvery locks. This gentleman had entered the service when he

was sixteen, consequently his education had not been what is called finished: he had now reached the age of sixty-five, and was a fair instance of the excellent working of the seniority system. During all this time he had never been out of India, had never seen a steam-packet, which little work of art had not been invented when he entered the service: as for a railroad or a steam-carriage, or any of the wondrous products of this wondrous age, he would have been utterly ignorant of their existence had it not been for the 'Illustrated London News.' He had a great idea, however, of his dignity and importance as brigadier, and exercised his powers and energies of mind in repressing as much as possible the growth of vegetation in the station of Islamabad, making officers cut down the trees in their gardens when they reached a certain height, to allow, as he said, of a free circulation of air. The mud walls round the compounds were kept at a uniform elevation, and not a speck of dirt or so much as a broken brick 'or bottle was allowed to disfigure the roads and bye-roads: for neatness and cleanliness Islamabad was indeed a pattern station, and had a brigadier's duties ended here, this gallant officer would have been a pattern brigadier. Of English society he

saw but little, preferring the conversation of his domestics, native officers, and sepoys, to that of his own countrymen. There were always two sleek and cleanly-dressed individuals, called bearers, in attendance upon this son of Mars: the head one, named Ramchurn, malicious tongues used to say, was the real commanding officer of the brigade. One of these men was always in the room with the brigadier, ready to answer questions, or converse with his master, who carried out the habits of the old Indian school to such an extent as never to do the least thing for himself that could by any possibility be done by another man. There were some things, such as eating and drinking, which this energetic Englishman was unhappily forced to do for himself; but if at any time during the day he wanted a pen or a piece of paper, or his handkerchief, the services of the sleek Hindoo were immediately called into requisition. At meal-times the British officer ate his dinner and drank his tea, attended by two Mussulman servants in addition to the Hindoo, who stood by looking on, and fanning his master with a large circular fan fixed on the end of a pole. After dinner the brigadier smoked a cheroot, reclining on two arm-chairs, and sipped weak cold brandy-and-water, enjoying the

society of his ever-present Hindoo attendant: at night, when bed-time came, the bearer performed for his master the laborious task of undressing him, and putting away his clothes, skilfully adjusted his nightcap on his head, and then summoned another domestic, also a Hindoo, but of lower caste, to shampoo the gallant officer; and under this operation, conversation with the barber, who was the operator, gradually grew less and less animated, and at last he sunk into repose. The two bearers laid themselves down outside the door (doorway I should have said, for such an effectual separation as a real door between master and domestic would have been too sore a trial for the former to endure), and went to sleep too.

My readers will, I hope, have gathered from the former chapter that during this extraordinary and eventful epoch of Anglo-Indian history, a regular system of espionage was kept up by the conspirators. They had friends everywhere: in the public offices native clerks watched jealously the proceedings of government, so far as they were able, and duly reported the contents of all letters and documents that came legitimately under their notice, and a great many that did not; there were spies at the officers' mess, at the private

table, in the ladies' dressing-rooms, all of whom laid up in their memory every word which was spoken in conversation which they were supposed not to understand, and of which they often did not understand much, and gave not unfrequently the most garbled and exaggerated reports of what they heard to the board. It may readily be imagined that our friend Ramchurn was an important personage: he was always present when the brigadier transacted business with his staff, and being an excellent English scholar, a fact of which it is needless to say his master was in total ignorance, he was able to keep his employers informed of every subject that was discussed, or ought to have been discussed in private, and of every order that was issued or contemplated. The interests of His Majesty the King of Delhi and of the Royal Family of Oude were ably represented at Islamabad by a number of very sharp, clever, designing men, who were none the less sharp, clever, and designing, because they had black skins and went among the European officers for fools or something very like it. The interests of the Honourable the East India Company and the British Government were, on the other hand, as far as military matters went—and in times of mutiny and rebellion military mat-

ters go a good way, seeing that the civil power is paralysed at the first outbreak—by Brigadier Cartwright, aided and controlled by Ramchurn, who was as zealous a servant of the Delhi family, though a Hindoo, as any they had in India. Thus was the order of things inverted: fools were in high places, while wise men were in low. Daily, hourly, was the net drawn closer and closer round the victims: the English officers and their families ate, drank, got up in the morning and went to bed at night, never dreaming that a sword was hanging over their heads, that a hundred plots and plans were being laid to prevent their escape, while every word they uttered almost and every movement that went on was watched and reported to their deadly foes by traitors in the household.

The commanding officers of the different bodies of troops at Islamabad were as far from suspecting the real danger they were in as even the brigadier. Colonel Wetherall never doubted for an instant that the men of his regiment, whom he had known and served with for the last twenty-five years, were faithful to the government, and, above all, to him. He thought it likely that the cavalry and the artillery perhaps might be induced to be mutinous, but with a thousand infantry well



drilled, disciplined and armed, what source of danger was there ? Captain Murray, who commanded the irregular cavalry, was perfectly persuaded that if all the rest of the army in India was to mutiny, his irregulars would stand fast, and, though not an alarmist, he thought it not unlikely that the artillery and infantry might show signs of disaffection. The officer commanding the artillery, Captain Hornby, was frequently heard to say, as he indeed really felt, that the artillery was the last body of men in India to desert their guns : they had stood to them bravely and manfully in many a well-fought field, and though it was likely enough that the mutiny might spread into the 75th N. I. and Murray's Irregulars, as long as the English had six nine-pounders and a faithful company of foot artillerymen to depend on, the mutineers would soon be brought to reason. The reader will easily see how hopeless a state of things was that which prevailed at Islamabad, yet how many cases were there of a similar position of affairs in India in the year of Grace 1857 ! If any officer suspected mutiny, he dared not reveal his suspicions, for they could only rest on his neighbours' men, not on his own. The brigadier commanding would have as soon accused Ramchurn of harbouring disaffection as any of the native

soldiery, mounted or dismounted; and if Ramchurn were faithless — *ruat cœlum* — what an idea! Poor man! he was happily quite unaware that Ramchurn had at least a month before sent to his home an inventory of the brigadier's goods and chattels that he intended to bring with him as soon as the British government was at an end, and his master's head cut off, which operation he had expressly bargained with the leading conspirators was to be entrusted to him, for he was a good man, this Ramchurn, and a humane one, and in consideration of years and years of kindness lavished on him by an indulgent master in whose service he had grown very rich, he was determined to do him a good turn when his time came, and by cutting off his head at one blow save him from the indignities and tortures which he knew were reserved for all the Europeans who fell into the hands of the rebels.

All the Englishmen at Islamabad, however, were not so blind as the officers I have mentioned. Mr. Dacres had long had his misgivings. He was not one of those men who can look at nothing but through the medium of his own prejudices. The cant phrases 'attachment of natives to our rule,' 'moral influence,' &c. &c., that were in everybody's mouth, never passed his lips. He had read

history and studied human nature. He had moreover worked hard—very hard—ever since he entered the service, first at learning his duties, and then at performing them. He knew there were not many civilians who worked as hard as he did, and very few (though he was not egotistical or conceited, he could not help knowing it) who were capable of getting through nearly as much work as he did in a given time ; yet he saw how utterly impossible it was even for him to give that attention which was required to cases that were brought before him : he felt how powerless he was to restrain bribery, perjury, corruption, and the grossest favouritism and jobbery among the native subordinates he was obliged to employ in the execution of the law ; he knew that neither Hindoo nor Mussulman had any real reason for preferring a Christian rule to any other, and he knew also how distasteful subjection to a foreign race always is and has been to every one of the numerous families of mankind. He saw that government depended virtually for its very existence upon its native army, composed of men who could not on any of the ordinary principles of human nature have any real cause of attachment to the employers they served—whose minds and feelings and thoughts were a sealed

book to their European superiors, and who, the instant it became their interest to do so, would most certainly take advantage of the power in their hands. Putting this and that together, Mr. Dacres could not shut his eyes to the fact that if mutiny became rife in the army, the troops at Islamabad, spite of their apparent good order and discipline, were just as likely to be infected with it as any others, and that if a disturbance took place, separated as they were by about 200 miles from the nearest European soldier, and surrounded by a large Mahometan population, who would of course side with the strongest, their position would become one of the extremest peril. Nor did the utter incompetency of the senior officer escape his notice, or the blind attachment of the junior ones to their men, an attachment which it had been their duty to awaken and encourage, and for which they were not certainly (in a moral point of view) to blame. He had very few natives about him that he could depend on for establishing a system of espionage. After the greatest care and thought, he had selected two men whom he employed in this manner. One of them after a few days exhibited the very faintest symptom of treachery: faint as it was, however, it did not escape the eagle eye that

watched him ; subsequent events justified the suspicion that this man had been playing false, had probably been discovered, tampered with and bribed over to the opposite party. The second he never had cause to doubt, and through him he learnt one or two significant facts :—1st, that meetings were held almost every night in the 75th lines, and occasionally in those of the cavalry and artillery; 2ndly, that signs were in use among certain classes of the sepoys and troopers to which there was no clue; 3rdly, that many of them had adopted an enigmatical style of conversation which was intelligent to the initiated alone; 4thly, that very frequently messengers mounted on government dâk (post) horses rode at a great speed to Islama-bad, transacted some business of a secret nature, and then sped on their way again; and, 5thly, that the native correspondence in the post-office had of late increased to a marvellous extent. This was about the limit of his knowledge; and even this scanty information was all he was destined to obtain, for the means by which he got it were suddenly taken out of his hands, and the death of the native recorded in the end of the last chapter sealed the fate of Mr. Dacres's last and only faithful spy. He of course, as in duty bound, kept

his superiors informed of all that came to his knowledge, and gave government the benefit of his surmises, and in particular requested that some step should be taken to control the post-office, and examine the native letters that passed through it: the idea, however, was repugnant to the great minds in whom rested at the time, humanly speaking, the fate of the British empire in the East. Red tape could strangle anything that escaped the clutches of prejudice and routine. Thus time went on at Islamabad; and thus fathers, mothers, sons and daughters, soldiers and statesmen, slept on a volcano.

## CHAPTER VI.

I AM sorry I cannot follow up the incomplete portrait of Brigadier Cartwright given in the last chapter by a more pleasing one of his right-hand man (after Ramchurn and the two khitmatgars), Captain Barncliffe the brigade-major. Truth compels me to state that the features of his moral physiognomy were anything but prepossessing. He was one of those men who never look you in the face; his eyes were always on the ground, and whenever he did raise them while conversing with another person, they seemed to take a furtive and hasty survey of the individual or individuals he was addressing from head to foot, then glanced round and took in anything that might be visible on either hand, and finally sought the ground again, where they remained fixed till a new idea or fresh conception caused them to be raised again, and to go through the same motion as before. I always think the worse of a man who never looks his fellow-man full in the face, and if it was the custom

to carry a purse in one's pocket, which it is not in India, should feel while in the proximity of such a man an instinctive desire to test the point as to whether it was all right or not. Captain Barncliffe, however, did sometimes fix his eye on the countenance of anyone he was speaking to, and then the impression was most disagreeable, for he could at times dart a glance of so much meaning and intelligence that you felt as if he was trying, and not unsuccessfully, to read your thoughts. He gave one the idea of being always wide-awake and alive to his own interests; he seemed to be harbouring a constant suspicion of everybody and everything, as if all the world were intent on taking some unfair advantage of him, and he was ever on the look-out to thwart that intent. He was mild and gentle in his manner, and could you have conversed with him in the dark, you would have gone away with the impression that you had been speaking to a downright good fellow who would go ever so far out of his way to do a neighbour—yes, or even a stranger—a good turn, and who would not wilfully harm a living creature for any consideration in the world. Always polite, always affable, always self-possessed, and always taking an interest apparently in every-



thing that he was spoken to about, no one would have guessed that the question which was being revolved in the active mind of the brigade-major was, 'how does this affect Thomas Barncliffe?'

In his idea, the highest profession a man could belong to was the law—one of the grandest feats achieved by human ingenuity finding a flaw in your neighbour's discourse or argument, or getting hold of some information about him which had been studiously kept secret from the world, but the possession of which gave the possessor power over him. When this intelligent officer sat on a court-martial, which he frequently had to do before he got on the staff, it was perfect martyrdom to the other members: there was a fair and legitimate field for his legal acumen to display itself, and you may be sure the golden opportunity was never lost. He would raise quibble upon quibble, objection after objection—all in such a mild, bland voice, and with such polite deference to his senior officers, that it was difficult for them to put him down. If he could detect the deputy judge-advocate in a blunder—and it was not very difficult, generally speaking—his triumph was complete, though there were no external signs of it, beyond an increasing blandness of voice and

respectfulness in his address. He was, as may well be imagined, a plague and terror to judge advocates. One promising young officer, who bid fair to rise rapidly in the department (and who had been promised an appointment in the stud for which he was by education and habits eminently qualified, only, as ill luck would have it, a vacancy occurred in the judge advocate's department before the stud, so, as his name was first in the list, he was put into it), threw up the office and went away for six months to the hills on 'sick leave;' at the expiration of which period, Captain Barncliffe being put on the brigademajor's list, and the coast being clear, this gentleman returned to his duties. The gallant captain had seen service, having been in no less than three campaigns, for which he duly obtained 'batta,' ribbons, medals, and clasps. He had, however, no particular affection for 'that villanous saltpetre,' and served his country on those critical occasions, at the same time that he served himself comfortably enough, as he always managed to secure an acting commissariat appointment, which lasted as long as the campaign lasted, but 'the worst of it was,' as he frequently observed to his friends, 'that, being a commissariat officer, he was not allowed to go under fire.' He had,

as every Englishman must have had, a most thorough contempt for his Indianised superior; but this, I conclude, was the case on 'à priori' reasoning, for, as far as exhibiting contempt goes, nothing could be more unlike it than Captain Barncliffe's manner towards Brigadier Cartwright.

He was, as may readily be supposed, by no means a favourite in the station, though his bland politeness would generally disarm any of his companions who might wish to resent his want of candour; but there was one officer in the place who never could trust himself to speak to him, and that was Captain Murray. He was an Englishman caricatured. Open, blunt, and honest to a degree, he conceived the most utter contempt and aversion for anyone who gave the least appearance of possessing the opposite qualities. He carried truth written in every feature of his face; he never spoke what he did not think, and thought it necessary always to speak not only as, but all, he thought. The consequence was that he not unfrequently gave utterance to disagreeable truths, which had been better kept in the background. He never had anything to do with Captain Barncliffe when he could avoid it, and when forced to, he got through his business as speedily as possible, looking all the

time as if he was taking a dose of physic: and he was never known to come away from an interview with the bland brigade-major that he did not say to the first person he met, no matter who it was, 'I'd swear that man would rob a church and kill the parson, and then go to dinner just as if nothing had happened.' After delivering himself of the sentiment, Captain Murray would allow his mind to resume its ordinary state of serenity.

One or two days after the last related events had occurred, Captain Barncliffe, on paying his daily business visit, at ten o'clock, to the brigadier, found that functionary in a state of great excitement.

'What do you think, Barncliffe?' he said, as that officer seated himself on a chair—'never heard such a thing for the last forty years. A baker has just been here, and tells me there is a quantity of human bone-dust mixed up with the flour, and he says, very naturally, that there is a good deal of excitement about it. The sepoys will not touch it—of course not; why, it would break their caste. Ramchurn here tells me the same. Is it not so, Ramchurn?' he added, turning his head half round and addressing the favourite. 'Is there bone-dust in the flour?'

'Certainly, sahib; your slave has eaten no

dinner for three days in consequence; but, not wishing to disturb your honour, your slave said nothing. Hindoos cannot eat flour with bone-dust in it.'

'There, you hear what he says—bone-dust! Why, the poor fellows' caste would be sacrificed—shameful, shameful. I've heard a deal about this; those papers are full of it; but I never thought we should have it occur here in Islamabad in my cantonment. I see what it is—it's all those confounded papers. In my time we had discipline in the country. When I was a young man, no half-starved son of a tailor, with his elbows out, and no shoes on his feet, was allowed to come into the country quill-driving, and spreading stories and putting people up to mischief. It is all that rascally press.'

I must do Brigadier Cartwright more justice than he would do himself, for, with all his animosity against the press, he was both by reading his paper, and paying for it regularly, a staunch supporter of the fourth estate:

While the brigadier had been thus giving vent to his feelings, Captain Barncliffe, who in cunning was almost a match for an Asiatic, and who had plenty of good sense when he could use it in a straightforward manner, had looked up in Ramchurn's face with one of

his piercing glances: he fixed his eye upon him for a moment, but it was long enough to let the wily Hindoo feel that that look had penetrated farther than he wished into the recesses of his heart.

‘Did you ask the baker, sir, where he got the flour from?’ said Captain Barncliffe, as soon as the brigadier had puffed out his wrath. ‘I should like to see the man. Is he here?’

‘Ramchurn, did we ask the baker where he got the flour from?’ said the brigadier. ‘Where is he? Here?’

‘The man is gone, sir; he said he could not tell where he got it from.’

‘Then, I should think, sir,’ suggested Captain Barncliffe, ‘he had better be told to destroy all the adulterated flour, and another time procure it from some other source.’

‘Certainly—just so. Ramchurn, call the baker here. Send for him.’

‘Your slave does not know where he is; he came and went.’

‘Was it long since he was here?’

‘No, not very long. How long is it, Ramchurn, since the man went away?’

‘A little while.’

‘Now I think of it, I recollect seeing a man in the road as I came along,’ mused Captain

Barncliffe; 'if you'll excuse me, sir, I'll just get into my buggy and drive after him.'

He had not gone a yard beyond the brigadier's gate before he saw a man some little way in front with a basket on his head; this was the man he met, and must be the baker who had been to the brigadier's.

'Here, my man,' he said, pulling up alongside of the pedestrian; 'you must come along with me. The sepoys have complained that you have been selling them flour with bone-dust in it, and they have lost their caste; you will be fined a hundred rupees for each case, and imprisoned for two years.'

The man deposited his basket on the ground, put his hands together, and begged for mercy, praying that he might be hanged there and then if there was a particle of bone-dust in the flour; he had never heard of such a thing.

Captain Barncliffe took him back to the brigadier.

'Will you be good enough, sir, to look at this man, and tell me if it is the same?'

'Certainly. Ramchurn, isn't that the man?'

Captain Barncliffe fixed his eyes on Ramchurn's face; the man hesitated in his answer, though he could not have had the slightest doubt as to the identity of the person who

had been talking to him only a few minutes before.

‘Surely, Ramchurn, that must be the man,’ said the brigadier, in a tone of growing assurance. ‘Don’t you think it is?’

Ramchurn, still under the influence of Captain Barncliffe’s eye, yielded at length an unwilling consent, and acknowledged it was the man.

‘You may go,’ said Captain Barncliffe. ‘Stay, first tell me your name and where you live.’

‘My name is Salik Ram, and I live in the Sudder Bazaar.’

‘Where did you get your grain from?’

‘Isri Chundur.’

‘Why did you tell me there was no bone-dust in the flour, when you had just told the brigadier here there was?’

‘I did not; your slave is a poor wretch; why should he say what was false? why should there be bone-dust? the sepoys said there was, and they said I should be hanged along with the others for selling it.’

This confession was given voluntarily, contradictory as it was, each sentence being delivered after a short interval, during which Captain Barncliffe kept his glance fixed on the man’s face; he regularly quailed under it.



‘Did Isri Chundur tell you anything when you bought the grain of him?’

‘Yes; he told me there was bone-dust mixed with all the flour by the orders of government, and that I was not to tell anyone till I had sold it all, or I should be hanged.’

‘And what did you say to the sepoy when they complained of your flour?’

‘I told them what Isri Chundur had told me.’

‘And why did you come to the brigadier?’

‘Because I was afraid.’

‘You may go.’

Captain Barncliffe then discussed a few business matters with the brigadier, and received his orders for the day, Ramchurn being present all the while, and noting down in the tablet of his memory every word that was spoken, while his face wore an expression of the most complete indifference and stupidity. Ten minutes after Captain Barncliffe’s buggy left the compound a messenger started to the sepoy’s lines, with a paper on which all the chief points in the conversation between the two officers were accurately reported.

The brigade-major drove down to the magistrate’s office and told him what had occurred. Half an hour after the grain-seller and the wholesale dealer were summoned to

the court. Native fashion, they both denied having ever said anything at all about bone-dust. When confronted with Captain Barncliffe the baker repeated his story, quite regardless of the fact that by so doing he was contradicting himself for the fourth time. Isri Chundur, however, denied the charge imputed to him, and there being no evidence, they were released on giving security for good behaviour.

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## CHAPTER VII.

MR. THURSTON was indefatigable in endeavouring to accomplish the object with which he had travelled to the far East, and, aided by the astute Wuly Mahomed, his companion, adviser, interpreter, and instructor (whom Dacres would persist in calling 'Wily Mahomed),' sought for information on all points and from all sources. Wuly Mahomed was a good specimen of his class. Educated at the Government College, Calcutta, he had acquired very tolerable proficiency in English: he could understand it when spoken or read to him, could express himself with tolerable fluency and considerable grammatical exactness, but failed in composition: he had a smattering of science, knew a good deal of Milton and Shakspeare by heart, and was very fairly up in history both ancient and modern. In religion he adhered to the faith of his forefathers, and was to all appearance a bigoted Mussulman. A liberal education had done nothing for him in the way of loosening the spiritual bondage

imposed on the followers of the Koran: he still had implicit faith in the fables recorded in that book, still looked upon a Nazarene as a creature doomed to everlasting perdition in the world to come, and so hateful to God and the prophet, that the joys of paradise might be purchased by the slaughter of any number of them. He was most particular in the observation of all the external rites of his religion, performed his ablutions and his prayers, and kept his fasts with the most rigid punctuality. Externally he was all this; in reality he believed all religions equally false and valueless, except as an instrument for supporting social institutions: and while he professed to worship the memory of saints and martyrs who had sacrificed their worldly interests or their lives for their belief, in his heart of hearts he felt the utmost contempt for their characters. In the same way the feelings with which he openly regarded the religion of the cross were a veil to other emotions of a directly contrary nature, which attended the contemplation of the superiority both of a physical and intellectual kind, possessed by the European believer in the New Testament over the Asiatic idolater and the followers of Islam. In short, he was an excellent specimen of the sort of character the

government educational system was calculated to produce.

Mr. Thurston was desirous of seeing as much as possible of the country, its buildings and antiquities, as well as of gathering information respecting the condition of the natives, and the abuses of the administration that might be useful to him in the 'House:' and as there was a famous ruin a few miles from Islamabad, which every stranger was taken to see as the lion of the place, Mr. Thurston, acting upon his host's advice, determined to go and inspect it. Accordingly, some days after his arrival he set out on one of the Nawab's elephants borrowed for the occasion, accompanied by his faithful factotum, Wuly Mahomed. Mr. Dacres had sent a set of tents out for the accommodation of his guest, that he might rest during the heat of the day and pass the night in them.

It will hardly be necessary for me to describe the famous ruined tomb of Chunderbagh, or to say that Mr. Thurston was extremely delighted with the beauty of the spot. He arrived there in the early morning, when it was still tolerably cool, and wandered about the place for a full hour, taking off his shoes whenever he entered any of the numerous old tombs and temples that stood

there, out of respect to the religious prejudices of the natives, that he was careful not to offend, and at the instigation of his companion, who assured him it was a customary mark of veneration paid by all Kaffirs and Feringhees whenever they visited holy places. 'These are the venerated relics,' mused Mr. Thurston aloud, partly to relieve his own feelings, and partly for the edification of his companion—'time-honoured memorials of a noble race that has passed away; we tread heedlessly on the graves of heroes, statesmen, philosophers of a former age; time levels all things, and the king and the peasant mingle their dust together. Time lays its desolating hand upon all things human: the massive building, the work of art, and the work of the human intellect, alike crumble to dust and oblivion beneath it: the ruin that has befallen these once stately edifices, is a fitting type of the extinction of those glorious social and religious institutions, founded perhaps by these very men who sleep beneath these domes. We trample upon the débris of the one, and with our modern civilisation and our system of government and education ride roughshod over the other.'

After expressing himself to this effect Mr. Thurston parted from Wuly Mahomed, who

had some business to attend to in the neighbouring village, where he said some friends of his resided, and walked leisurely up to the tent which had been pitched for him in one of the magnificent groves of mango trees, with which the neighbourhood abounded. On approaching it he was a little surprised to see it surrounded by a crowd of well-dressed respectable-looking natives, most of whom wore belts and swords. Mr. Thurston was sorry that he had parted with his interpreter, as it would be difficult for him, unaided, to find out what the numerous visitors at his tent wanted. He understood enough of the language, however, to discover, when addressed by two of the men, who seemed to be the most important characters among the assemblage, that they were the village authorities and posse comitatus come to pay their respects to the visitor. The fact was, that the commissioner's tents being pitched so close to the village was quite enough to arouse the curiosity of the rustics; and when it became known, on enquiry from the commissioner's servants, who were busy getting the tents ready, that it was to be occupied by a friend of the 'bara sahib' or the great man, a gentleman who was a much greater 'bara sahib' himself, being nothing less than a 'Vakeel

from the Great Assembly of England or Majlis of Inglistan,' the head man of the place, determined to lose no time in going to pay his respects. Mr. Thurston could speak just enough Hindustanee to make them understand that he had lately come from England, and knew nothing of the language beyond the smattering of a few words ; and the native visitors knew just enough English to explain that they were wholly unable to converse in that tongue.

However, Mr. Thurston accepted their salams with the utmost affability, and, as far as he could do so by signs, begged him to believe they had his best wishes for their welfare and happiness. This he thought would conclude the ceremony, which was becoming rather protracted and proportionately awkward ; so, holding out his hand to shake hands with the front row, he prepared to enter the tent. Instead, however, of taking his proffered hand, they held out theirs towards him, each holding on his extended palm one company's rupee current coin of the realm.\*

\* It is the custom in India for native subordinates, when visiting a superior on state occasions or visits of ceremony, to hold out in the hand a coin. It is confined, I believe, to officials in the Civil Department: native



‘Remarkable instance of liberality,’ thought Mr. Thurston, trying to make his friends understand that he was in no want of money by tapping his trousers-pocket, showing his purse heavy with rupees (he had not been long enough in the country to leave off carrying about his purse), and sundry other signs calculated, as he thought, to give the impression that he was a wealthy man. All was of no avail: they only smiled, and still kept their hands extended, becoming more and more importunate.

‘It will not do to hurt the feelings of these poor fellows,’ he said to himself; and wishing at the same time to put an end to the interview, he went round from one to the other, taking the rupee from each with a look of grateful affability, bade them a courteous adieu, and went inside the tent.

Mr. Thurston walked up and down the tent while breakfast was being brought, and meditated on the peculiar phase of native character

officers in the army in the same way hold out their swords. It is a ceremony implying fealty, denoting in the one case, I suppose, an acknowledgment of the Civil authority, by which the revenue of the country is collected and administered, and in case of the military, an offer of the sword and services of the inferior to the superior.

lately presented to him. ' This was the treatment he had experienced from a people universally described by travellers and journalists as avaricious! What part of England, of Europe—nay, of the world—was there that he could go to, where he would meet with such undisguised open-handed liberality? How grievously had the national character of the race been misrepresented! It was strange, too, all writers upon India and the Indians were unanimous in their opinions respecting the avarice and love of money among the natives—could it be?—and the thought as it flashed across his mind seemed to leave a sting behind: was it not the effect of grievous tyranny, and a symptom of the oppression under which the natives of India had groaned for centuries? They were so much accustomed to robbery and exaction on the occasion of the appearance of an Englishman among them, that of their own accord they brought the money that they knew would be extorted from them—perhaps by torture!

The bare idea that his friend and host should be guilty of such systematic oppression was so painful that he could scarce bring himself to eat any breakfast. The money which was lying in his left waistcoat-pocket seemed to weigh him down, to press heavily upon his

heart; how could he broach the subject to Mr. Dacres, how allude to anything so disgraceful, how reproach a man to whose hospitality and kindness he was so largely indebted? Yet the reflection that it had fallen to his lot to reveal to the British public the secrets of that tremendous system of tyranny which was being carried on by British officers under the authority of the British government, was a cheering one. Opinions might be doubted, assertions discredited, but here was a fact, a stern fact, a stubborn thing to deal with, and such should the court of directors find it, when he, Mr. Thurston, reached England, prepared to expose the abuses of the system they upheld.

Thoughts like these were busy in his brain all breakfast-time. When that meal was finished, he took his hat and sauntered out of the tent, intending to beguile his time by wandering about a little under the shade of the splendid mango trees beneath which his tents had been pitched.

Now, it so happened that on the morning on which this gentleman visited Chunderbagh, a treasure-party returning from a neighbouring station a hundred and fifty miles off, consisting of a company of the 75th Native Infantry under command of an ensign, reached

the same place, and encamped in the mango grove very near the spot where Mr. Dacres's tent had been pitched. The treasure-tumbrils were empty, and with the exception of a single sentry over the carts, and another over the ammunition of the detachment, all the sepoys were busily engaged, each squatting within his own magic circle, in preparing their mid-day meal.

This operation with a Hindoo of high caste, and such most of the sepoys were, was an important one. Each man clears a little spot of ground about three or four feet square, on which he erects his little fireplace built up with earth softened by water, and, when feasible, plasters the whole with a mixture in which cow-dung forms the chief ingredient. In this he sits, secure from all intrusion of polluting low-caste men. In the old days, the shadow of an officer falling upon one of these cooking-places, or 'chulas' as they are called, was sufficient to make the bigoted Hindoo throw away his food as polluted. The absurd prejudice by degrees so far wore away, that latterly, so long as an English officer did not tread upon the *sacred* spot, or touch it or any of the utensils, they did not care for his approaching them while engaged in their meals, though they never liked it.

Some had a goodly pile of bread cakes ready made, others were putting the finishing stroke to their manufacture, and others were stirring up the melted ghee with a long brass spoon. It was not far from Mr. Thurston's tent to where the sepoys' 'chulas' had been made, and chance led him straight in that direction. On the way, he accidentally encountered his friend Wuly Mahomed, and the two joining company, sauntered along till they reached the place where the extensive cooking was being carried on. Mr. Thurston was much interested in the scene, and expressed some curiosity about the kind of food the sepoys were preparing. Wuly Mahomed advised him to go and try it.

'But do they not look upon the approach of an Englishman to the spot where they are eating as a pollution? I have heard so.'

'No, you are mistaken—these are stories invented by travellers to please their readers: go and try.'

'I shall offend them.'

'On the contrary, they will be pleased: wait—I will speak to them.'

'This is a great sahib from the "Majlis of Inglistan," who has come all the way from Europe to eat with you,' added Wuly Mahomed, addressing the sepoy nearest him, but

speaking in a loud voice so that ten or twenty might hear.

Immediately there was a cessation of business: the men stopped kneading their bread and stirring the ghee, and looked up enquiringly. 'Won't you let the sahib eat with you?' said Wuly Mahomed again, giving his voice a queer half-derisive, half-contemptuous intonation: 'see, he is standing here—you know there will be no caste soon—why delay?'

'I have interrupted them,' said the philanthropist deprecatingly—and he made a sign for them to go on eating, at least he intended to signify as much; the sepoys, though, understood something very different by it.

'They only fear that you will not approve of their food—they will be offended if you leave without tasting any,' said Wuly Mahomed persuasively.

'I should be sorry to offend them—do they really wish me to take some?'

'Yes—take a little from the one who is nearest, merely as a compliment.'

Mr. Thurston, thus pressed, stepped up to the man who was nearest, and, with a bland smile, took a cake off the heap and commenced eating it. The man started to his feet in astonishment.

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‘I fear I have offended him,’ said Mr. Thurston; ‘pray assure him that I meant no harm, and acted on your suggestion.’

‘The sahib says,’ interpreted Wuly Mahomed, speaking in the same tone of voice that he had used before, ‘that you are a great fool for making such a fuss about his taking one cake; before six months are over you will be glad to eat with the Feringhees—he has come from England on purpose to see to it—there is to be no more caste.’

With a look in which the utmost intensity of hatred was mingled with defiance, a look that for the moment transformed the man before him into a demon and made Mr. Thurston feel very uncomfortable, the outraged Brahmin placed his foot under the brazen platter upon which the remainder of his food was standing, and upset it: he then took up his (lota) brass pot in which the stock of ghee for the day’s consumption was simmering upon the fire, turned the contents into it, making it blaze up for a moment or two merrily, and then, gathering up his pots and pans, walked away with the air of a martyr.

‘I have assuredly offended that man,’ said Mr. Thurston.

‘Not at all—he merely meant you to take the rest while he poured the ghee on the fire

as an oblation to his god and a sacrifice to avert evil from your head. See, he is gone to get more food.'

Mr. Thurston looked steadily in his companion's face; not a muscle moved, he returned his gaze calmly. This gentleman considered himself a physiognomist, and felt convinced he read 'honesty' written legibly in the guileless features of his companion. He could not help having his misgivings, however, and turned to walk towards his tent. Wuly Mahomed turned too, but not till he had looked round at the men who had been silent and astonished spectators of the scene, and intimated, as plainly as if he had spoken it, 'You see!'



## CHAPTER VIII.

THE Nawab of Islamabad was spending his evening hours in his favourite resort—the apartment of his wife. The lady's name was Leila, and as she had some influence in the fate of several characters in the story, a few words about her will not be out of place. She was very different from most women in her position—that is, from Indian ladies as our ideas represent them. She was by no means one of those animals, those soulless beauties, those frail beings of flesh and blood, whose only object in existence is to contribute to the sensual gratification of their lords and masters, who spend the whole of their lives, that is, till they grow old and ugly, in smoking and sleeping and dressing themselves to receive occasional visits from their lovers or husbands, that travellers and romancists are so fond of depicting in their descriptions of the inmates of an Asiatic harem.

We Englishmen certainly know but little of the domestic life of the Indian aristocracy,

and it is difficult to guess from what data we derive the notions that we have of the character of the Asiatic ladies of the upper classes. Now and then an English lady, the wife of some officer of high rank, is allowed as a great favour to penetrate into the sanctum sanctorum of the women's apartments, and a visit of ceremony is paid to a favoured few who dress themselves out for the occasion, and put on, with their best clothes and jewels, their best, and probably too most reserved, behaviour. I wonder what would be thought of a foreigner who considered himself able to judge of the character of domestic life among the English, or took upon himself to describe the qualifications, accomplishments, principles, and habits of English ladies, from the information gained during the few minutes spent in the society of one or two families in the monotonous ceremonial of a morning call.

Yet our ideas of Indian ladies are formed upon even much less data than this; for, in the first place, there are very few who have gained access to them at all; in the second, when a visit has been paid, it has been, from its very rarity and exceptional character, a much greater business of form and ceremony than even that stiff affair, a morning visit, among us; and, in the third, it would require

tact and judgment of character much greater than is generally possessed by our ladies (not excepting Mrs. Colin Mackenzie), to penetrate, in the short time allowed them during one of these visits of ceremony, the mystery of Asiatic character, concealed under the veil of customs, language, mode of thought, and feelings totally different to our own.

Nor must it be forgotten that not only are we debarred from all access to female society among the upper classes in the East, but even the male sex, with whom some of us associate on intimate terms, never by any chance make the slightest allusion in conversation to domestic matters: as they will not insult a friend by asking after his wife's health (in European society the first thing almost that politeness requires of us), so neither do they expect to be insulted by having any question put to them on the forbidden subject.

We are, therefore, in total and utter ignorance respecting the habits and details of domestic life among the upper classes in India. We have, indeed, plenty of evidence that ladies in Asia do not exercise the same amount of influence over their families and households as those of more enlightened nations. This is apparent from a thousand things, but I think we should be wrong in assuming that even

within the most jealously guarded precincts of an Oriental harem, woman never asserts her rights. It must be a hard bondage certainly, much harder than anything we have a right to imagine these ladies are ever subjected to, that will expunge all feeling of maternal love and influence from the heart of woman: and among the higher classes of civilised Europe, where the artificial necessities of fashionable life have so many claims to make upon the time and attention of the fair and youthful matrons that adorn the dazzling saloons and ball-rooms of Vanity Fair, I suspect there are many homes (so to call them) where wedded love and domestic happiness, and a mother's watchful care over her young children, would show but a sorry figure when compared with the Eastern harem.

That Asiatic ladies are not wanting in energy and spirit, we have numberless proofs. The 'Arabian Nights,' as far as they go, and the tales by Persian authors, may be supposed to give a fair representation of manners and customs in the East, and thus we gain a little insight into the domestic habits of families whose indoor life is a sealed book to us. But there are many instances of Eastern ladies who have left the seclusion of the harem and interfered in public life so successfully as

to earn for themselves places in the page of history, both in past and present times. Noor Jehan is famous in Indian annals, and there are numberless stories of heroines related in the Persian histories of the Mahometan dynasties of India. In our own time, the Ranec Chunda of Lahore, the Ranee of Jhansie, the Begums of Delhi and Lucknow, have made themselves sufficiently notorious.

But though the public acts of these ladies will give but little insight into their private lives, and though it would be absurd to generalise from the small data we have to go upon, we may safely take our stand upon the broad basis of the universal laws of nature; and to take for granted that the fair sex who in the Western world exercise so great an influence over all society, and in almost every circle and every concern of life, are in the Eastern the utter nonentities they seem to be, because they appear so seldom in the foreground, is a gratuitous assumption unwarranted by the analogy of nature in other cases.

The Nawab was reclining upon a soft carpet, with velvet cushions placed so as to support the back and to allow of his leaning upon his elbow on either side. The more temperate breezes of evening had succeeded to the heat of the day, at that season of the year not ex-

cessive, and as the sun had been set for full an hour, the shades of night had begun to envelope completely the whole face of nature. The evening had been spent in conversation between the Nawab and his wife, and yielding at length to the effect of the small dose of opium that had been mixed with the tobacco of his hooka and the stillness of the hour and the softness of the air, he had fallen into a light slumber.

Leila sat by his side, one hand clasped in his, the other supporting her chin, leaning with her elbow upon the lower part of the venetian shutter, the upper being thrown wide open to admit the air; she gazed at the stars as they came out one by one, and lit up the evening sky, in pensive silence. What a calm and placid life was hers! how dream-like an existence! From morn to eve, from eve to morn, there was nothing that she could be said to have to do: that toil which is the lot of all mankind, she seemed exempted from, without a single care to occupy her mind, without a thought for the future. Everything that luxury could demand, or wealth procure, was hers; every wish gratified almost as soon as expressed: her only labour seemed to be to devise means of passing time pleasantly; her only duties, to

please the man she loved with all the fervour of a young and passionate devotion; her only care, the selection of jewels and ornaments that suited her best, or pleased her husband most. Certainly, if earth and earthly treasure could make a human being happy, Leila ought to have been so. And she was happy in her quiet way; but there was a void in her mind that could not be filled by all her wealth—a something wanting amid her superfluity of comfort and luxury, and all those fleeting pleasures which we are ever striving to obtain, and of which he who possesses most is counted in the world the most favoured child of Fortune; a want which these things could not satisfy; a craving after the fulfilment of some unknown, undefinable desire which could not be gratified. Her mind, undisciplined and untutored, was forced to draw its own inferences from its own premises; but it was full of a strange mixture of wild and uncontrolled fancies, of mild and gentle feeling, and of fiery passion; a fair example of what the human mind can become, when left to wander in the darkness of a false religion, under a system so depressing to the moral energies of womankind as that which regulates domestic life in Asia, and to feed upon itself. Had she been a mother, there

would have existed tender ties to engage her attention and employ her thoughts ; but, deprived of that blessing invaluable to every married woman under heaven, and, above all, to the wedded inmate of the harem, she felt and freely indulged, when not conversing with her husband, in that insinuating and dangerous luxury, the love of solitude.

Her musings were interrupted by a noise in the court-yard below ; the gate was opened, and a horseman entered : a few minutes after, she gently awoke her husband, as a eunuch stood at the door, with hands together in an attitude of prayer. The domestic made a low obeisance, and said there was a man below craving the favour of a private interview with the Nawab, to secure which he had sent the accompanying letter. The Nawab aroused himself, took the letter with a yawn, and called for a light.

A lamp was immediately brought and placed beside him. He took the letter at first listlessly, and glanced at the seal. In an instant his eyes were riveted upon it, and a half-formed exclamation passed his lips as he hastily broke the seal.

‘ Look, Leila, what is this ? ’ he said, turning with an embarrassed air towards her.

She turned also, and moving close to his



side, leant her hand upon his shoulder, and they perused the epistle together.

It was a 'firman,' or royal decree, 'from the king of kings, the light of Islam, the centre of the world,' and various other epithets of the same kind, to the 'nobleman of high estate, the raiser of the standard of glory, the eye of faith, the Nawab Zainat-ul-abadin, requiring him to receive the bearer, and confer with him in confidence on affairs of state.'

A slight frown passed over the brow of the Nawab, as he respectfully closed the letter, and made a sign to the domestic to summon the bearer to his presence. He then turned to Leila, and kissing her tenderly, bade her retire. She retired, but not very far out of hearing. At the further end of the apartment, a handsome damask curtain, with a purple velvet fringe, concealed a recess beyond; she opened it, and tripping lightly within, let it fall behind her. She had scarcely disappeared from sight, and the curtain was still rustling, when the stranger was announced.

He was a man of more than middle height, but strongly built, and striking in appearance. He was fair; indeed, by his complexion and the colour of his hair and eyes he might have

been taken for a European. His forehead was high and ample, his eyes deep set beneath shaggy eyebrows, and with that strange restless glance we sometimes see, and which seldom or never fails to convey a disagreeable impression, for it is impossible to read any meaning in it, or even to mark distinctly upon what object the eye itself is fixed. His dress was plain—a simple Oriental riding costume; a Cashmere scarf was twisted round his waist, and the handles of his sword and dagger were of gold. He made a low bow with all the ease and grace of Oriental etiquette, and at a sign from the Nawab seated himself.

‘Your highness cannot be altogether unaware of the nature of my mission,’ the stranger began, after a short pause: ‘in these days every true son of Islam and follower of the prophet (on whom and whose descendants be the blessing of Alla!) keeps his ears open.’

‘And prudent men lay the finger of silence on the lips of secrecy,’ said the other with a meaning smile.

‘Undoubtedly, till it is time to speak. The brave man lets his sword rest in the scabbard till the enemy approaches, but then he draws it.’

‘But what proof have you that it is now a safe time to open the lips or to draw the

• sword? The firman says that you are to be treated with confidence?’

‘It is to offer these proofs that I am here: the state of the country, and the hopes of Islam now revived, and the prophecies of holy men now ripe for fulfilment, are all known to your highness?’

The Nawab signified his assent.

‘Then,’ continued the other, speaking with animation, ‘I need not disguise from your highness that the hand of destiny has unveiled the face of opportunity. All things conspire to insure success; the Kaffirs themselves rush blindfold to their own destruction, hurrying on the approach of Fate with their own hands. Alla is working for us in every part of the world—not only in Hindustan, but Europe. I have just returned from the Holy City, and heard while there, from the lips of Turkish soldiers who had come from the confines of Roum, how the accursed English have been weakened by their useless attack upon the Russians. The English army is destroyed, the bones of their soldiers whiten the plains, and the vultures and dogs have fattened on their corpses till they feed no more. In Hindustan the sahibs tell us about their conquests, their success at Sebastopol. It is all a lie; they have failed with the aid of the

great French army to take the place, and without the French they would have perished before their ships reached the shore. But we all know better; we all know how the strong and powerful fortress of Kars has been taken by the Russian soldiers, though defended by the largest army England ever sent abroad, and the bravest generals they could find. Kars is a mighty fortress, and has been taken, —Sebastopol a small ‘ghuri’ (stronghold) compared with it, and the English have been unable to capture it.’

The Nawab listened attentively, but said nothing. The other continued—

‘In Hindustan there are no English soldiers; the few that were have gone to Iran, and the swords of the faithful have driven their souls to hell.’

‘We heard that they had gained the victory there.’

‘It is false: I saw an ambassador from the Sultan of Iran, who arrived the day before I left Delhi, and he swore to me on the Koran that the English had all perished—not one survives.’

The Nawab moved nervously, and seemed still more attentive to his visitor; but he resettled himself again to listen.

‘I have more to tell,’ resumed the other.

‘The English have sealed their own fate, and there is not a single Hindoo sepoy that will fight for them. You have heard of the new cartridge they have had sent out from England, anointed with the fat of the unclean?’

‘Pish,’ said the Nawab, interrupting him with a look of impatience and disgust: ‘these stories idle fools circulate to throw dust in the eyes of the blind. Who does not know that it is all a fabrication? Who does not know that the English never break their word—that the word of an Englishman is as good as the oath of another man—ay, better? and how many years have they ruled Hindustan, and protected our holy faith as well as the religion of the accursed idolaters, the Hindoos and the Sikhs? By the Prophet, if a man swear that it is his religion to eat his children, the English rulers will let him, so it be a point of faith.’

The stranger laughed—a soft musical laugh, not intended to deride; there was amusement, not contempt, in his tone. ‘Your highness will pardon me. These may be idle tales; but the fool is often stronger than the wise man. A stone may be a talisman, of value in both worlds, while the precious gold is worthless beside it. That which is folly to wise men may be the faith of fools. Idle stories or

not, the sepoys all believe them, and that is enough for us.'

'How?'

'They are convinced that the English have broken faith with them at last, and are ready to fight for the Badshah, the Mussulman for the glory of Islam, and the Hindoo for his accursed gods. The instrument becomes holy from the use made of it; these accursed idolaters will help to overthrow the English, and then the people of Islam can trample them under foot.'

'But the people?'

'Are all well taught that the English will first make the sepoys Christians, and then use them to make all Hindustan Christian too?'

'But do you believe this?'

'That matters not; the people all believe it. I believe there is no God but God, and Mahomet is his prophet—that is enough for me.'

'And enough for any man who rests his hopes on the next world; but to raise the standard of rebellion against a powerful nation like the English, something more is requisite. The sepoys will not be content to fight without pay; if they are allowed to pay themselves by plunder, they will not be scrupulous as to whose property they help themselves to.'

Besides, remember, the greater part of them are Hindoos. The English are wealthy and brave; and not only that, but crafty too; they know how to use their power, and can turn race against race, faith against faith, Hindoo against Mussulman, Sikh against both, and the conquerors in the strife will have no mercy—blood must flow like water, and the whole of Hindustan will be turned into a very hell, till the English come out conquerors again, and trample the conquered in the dust. Have you weighed all these things?’

‘Yes—weighed them in the balance of reason and faith. Alla fights for us, we cannot fail.’

‘The God of the Christians is powerful!’

‘The Kaffirs!’ said the other, angrily interrupting him, ‘they have no God, they are accursed of Heaven, and the swords of the faithful can send them all to hell. But I have said enough—perhaps too much, and with permission will take my leave. First the message from Heaven I am commissioned to give shall be revealed.’

‘Nay, then, give me a message from Heaven, and I am content. As yet I have received none.’

‘Raise your eyes aloft, and listen in faith, and you shall hear.’

The Nawab obeyed, following the example set by his strange visitor, and, straining his head back, gazed up at the ceiling. His eye had been fixed upon it for a few seconds, when a voice that seemed to come from outside the roof, and penetrate into the room below, exclaimed, 'There is no God but God, and Mahomet is the prophet of God; let the faithful of Islam draw the sword of extermination upon the Kaffir Nazarenes, for their time is come.'

It ceased, and all was silent. The Nawab turned towards his visitor, who had risen preparatory to taking his departure.

'Alla is gracious to the faithful,' he said, speaking in a solemn tone, as if delivering a message he was inspired with; and as the words passed his lips, his eye lit up and sparkled with unusual brilliancy and fervour: 'a second sign shall be granted to your highness. There is the sacred tomb of the holy Saiyad Imam-ood-deen at Chunderbagh. Fast for seven days, and on the seventh, at midnight, repair to the spot, enter the tomb alone, and you shall hear the same message from the lips of the Saiyad himself, on whom be peace, who shall appear to you robed in light.'

Without another word, he made a low obeisance and departed. A few minutes



afterwards the sound of his horse's hoofs on the pavement of the court-yard betokened his departure. Still the Nawab sat in the same position, his eyes fixed on the door through which the stranger had passed, absorbed in reverie. A light touch upon his shoulder recalled him to consciousness ; he started and looked round—it was Leila. They sat up talking earnestly together till the dawn appearing in the east warned them to take repose.

## CHAPTER IX.

MR. THURSTON, after due deliberation, resolved not to communicate to his host his experiences at Chunderbagh. Various considerations led to this resolve. Perhaps in his heart of hearts there lurked a slight suspicion that the symptom of the grievous results of the dire oppression under which the people of India groaned, might be explained away on the excuse of some ceremony or custom consecrated by antiquity; but to the faint voice of this lurking suspicion he would pay no heed. 'There was no object to be gained,' he said to himself, 'in imparting his views to Mr. Dacres; the whole system of government in India was corrupt—rotten to the very core. The men who formed the executive and carried out the principles of such a government must have deadened all the better feelings of their nature before they could have sold themselves to become the instruments of tyranny. What good could be effected by reasoning with such men? He

might as well talk to a Russian nobleman of the rights of serfs, or discourse to an American upon loyalty. No, he would keep the dread secret buried in his bosom till he reached England, and there he would reveal it ; or he would write a book like Mrs. Beecher Stowe, and if any doubted the tale he had to tell, he would confound all scepticism by producing and exhibiting the rupees.'

He had some misgivings about the affair with the sepoy : he didn't half like the look the man gave him as he picked up his pots and pans and stalked away—he thought he looked 'uncanny,' as his friend Ronald Macdonald, whose fathers and forefathers had dwelt north of the Tweed, called it. And once or twice a suspicion crossed his mind that Wuly Mahomed might have been playing him a trick.

There was an unpleasant expression he had heard several times made use of on board the steamer on his way out. It was a vulgar word—slang, and of all things Mr. Thurston had a horror of slang—still the word haunted him all that day—he could not get rid of it ; it was in his ears, it seemed written by a magic hand upon the yellow lining of the tent ; when he took up a book, he half expected to see it on the top of every page—when he went to sleep, still the word haunted him in his dreams.

He fancied he was addressing the House on the India question, when a malicious member, a certain gallant colonel—a great authority on Indian matters, by the bye, and a member of the court—actually had the audacity to pull him by the coat-tail and shout the word into his ear, as he involuntarily sat down amid the laughter of the House. He awoke, and behold it was a dream! but he was annoyed, restless, feverish, so recollecting that his host had put up a little packet of entertaining books for light reading in case he might feel inclined to avail himself of them, he got up, and lighting a candle, put it on a chair near the bed, and putting his hand into the parcel of books, took the first one that it came in contact with, and retired to his couch.

Was he bewitched? in the land of sorcery and sorcerers he undoubtedly was! No sooner had he opened the book and turned his eye on the title-page, than he saw the dread word that haunted him—G. R. I. F. F. He had lighted on ‘The Adventures of a Griff.’ With an exclamation of the deepest and most intense disgust, he hurled it to the other side of the tent.

Now it so happened that Mr. Dacres’s bearer, a confidential and highly-faithful domestic who had been sent by his master to attend to the

wants of his guest, was sleeping on the ground, as is customary, just outside the tent, with his head resting against the canvass wall. 'The Adventures of a Griff' being hurled with all the force Mr. Thurston's disgust could communicate to his muscles, hit the bearer on the head, and he, as is the manner of natives under such circumstances, being awoke out of a sound sleep by a blow on the head, jumped up, shouting most lustily 'that he was killed—that he was already dead—that thieves and burglars had taken possession of the tent, and all was lost.'

Up jumped two Lascars, an equal number of cook-boys, a chuprassie, and a mehter (sweeper) who was sleeping on the opposite side, one and all of whom aided the clamour to the best of their ability by rushing about shouting, 'Chor! chor!' (Thieves! thieves!) and that somebody had been killed. Mr. Thurston sat all this time in bed, wondering how such a clamour could have arisen, and what would be the consequences, for there was no knowing how far it might not spread, seeing that all the pariah dogs in the neighbourhood had taken it up, and were barking vociferously in all directions.

Among others who were disturbed by the noise was Wuly Mahomed, who slept in a small

tent called a '*routy*' close by, and who was soon upon the spot. Now appeared in full relief the advantages of an English education. Instead of rushing about and hallooing, like the rest of his countrymen, Wuly Mahomed being an educated and therefore sensible man, went inside the tent to see if there were any traces of the thief to be found there. All he saw was Mr. Thurston sitting up in bed with his night-cap on, wondering what in the world all the fuss was about. Questions were asked, explanations enquired for, still the matter remained a mystery. The bearer, who bethought himself of entering the tent too, as soon as Wuly Mahomed had set him the example, declared most positively he had been hit on the head, and put his hand up and looked at it, to see if it was not covered with blood, as he appeared to expect it would be. Mr. Thurston positively declared no one had been in the tent—somehow he was not particularly anxious that it should be known he had flung the book away, it would seem so childish, and Wuly Mahomed might get hold of it, and would see what it was, and understand, which was much worse, why the philanthropist had flung it away; so he begged them all to leave him to repose—'The whole thing was a dream of the bearer's, it was a false alarm.' The astute Mahometan,

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however, did not think so, or else he conceived a suspicion that Mr. Thurston had something to do with the affair, though he did not choose to say what, and finding on which side of the tent the bearer had been sleeping, went to the spot to examine.

‘Pray don’t distress yourself, Wuly Mahomed,’ urged his master, entreatingly; ‘it was all fancy, I am sure; let us go to sleep again.’ Wuly Mahomed, however, by this time had caught sight of a book lying on its face, open, and with the pages sorely crumpled, upon the ground close to the ‘kanat’ or canvass wall of the tent. He did not utter a word, but picked it up, and taking it to the light, read the title. He glanced at Mr. Thurston; it was nothing more than a passing glance, but the discomposed member of parliament felt that his secret was all read—his self-respect was gone. Wuly Mahomed deposited the book upon the table, and wishing his patron ‘good night,’ left the tent without another word. The bearer also retired to his place of rest, and muttering *sotto voce* to the other servants that the sahib was certainly out of his mind, wrapt up his face in his clothes and went to sleep.

Next day Mr. Thurston returned to Islama-bad in time for breakfast. In his resolution to keep his adventure a secret, he little thought

what a system of espionage went on in addition to the tyranny that was practised on the native population.

It so happened that he was destined to meet that morning at Mr. Dacres's breakfast-table the collector and magistrate of Islamabad, Mr. Edward Prinsep Bailey Lushington Hastings Plowden Harley, of the Bengal Civil Service, whom I beg to introduce to my readers. This officer, in his capacity of collector and magistrate, was in the habit of receiving daily reports of every incident that occurred in the neighbourhood of the villages and 'thannas' in his district, and Chunderbagh being only a few miles distant, the report from that place of the day before had been received by Mr. Harley, and its contents read to him that morning. In thorough Oriental style, the event of Mr. Thurston's visit was mentioned, and the fact of the native authorities having proceeded to that gentleman's tent for the purpose of paying their respects on hearing that he was a member of the illustrious 'Majlis of Inglistan' was also described. In the most delicate way imaginable, to which an English translation would do but sorry justice, the result of the interview was depicted, and the mistake the traveller had made in appropriating the rupees presented merely as a matter of form, in token



of respect, was also described in flowery Persian metaphor, with the gentlest of all gentle hints that the village community would be decidedly gratified if the coin could be returned to them. When the report was read out, the full force of the absurdity struck Mr. Harley, and he roared with laughter, rather to the astonishment of certain sedate members of the Amlah (native *employés* of the court) who were present, who, however, speedily recovered themselves, and as they saw the sahib laughing, proceeded to laugh also, one by one, though they none of them knew why.

Expecting to meet Mr. Thurston at the commissioner's house, Mr. Harley went over to breakfast, fully determined, however, not to let his superior into the secret, partly from fear he would play the traitor and warn his guest, and partly because he thought he had caught a thing he was very fond of, a good joke which was too good not to keep to himself.

Mr. Thurston, who, to do him justice, was very zealous in his efforts to acquire information, generally managed to make the conversation at Mr. Dacres's table turn on public affairs ; and, accordingly, the trio on the present occasion had only just begun discussing their fish, curry, and rice, when the leading question from the member of parliament

brought the conversation to bear upon the topic that was ever uppermost in his mind. After an observation or two upon the prevalence of bribery and the corruption of justice in our law courts, Mr. Harley said—

‘By the way, it reminds me, I have a curious case, just reported to me, of an attempt at bribery. A murder was committed some time ago in my district, and it appears, as far as I can judge from a superficial view of the case, for I have not yet investigated it, that a bribe has been offered to, and accepted by, a person not answerable to the Mofussil law courts to take the responsibility of the crime upon himself, knowing the difficulties that stand in the way of the law.’

‘Indeed! I suppose a large sum was paid,’ said Mr. Thurston.

‘On the contrary, the amount paid was trifling, proportionate perhaps to the risk—proportionate perhaps to the value the recipient placed upon human life and his own neck. The man sold himself for eighteen rupees!’

‘Is it possible!’ exclaimed Mr. Thurston, much interested in the new phase of native character, as he thought it, thus exhibited. ‘But I do not see how such a measure could be pursued with any definite hope of success.’

The evidence must result in exonerating the innocent, and pointing to the real criminal.'

'Your observation, my dear sir, shows how much you have got to learn with regard to the operation of our criminal laws. Witnesses to any fact, and to any amount in number, are to be purchased readily, even in the ante-rooms of our temples of justice, our courts.'

'I have heard this statement made before, but could scarcely credit it.'

'Credit it ! Ask any magistrate in the country if it is not so. Will you not corroborate my statement, Dacres?'

'It is, I fear, but too true in the main,' said the gentleman appealed to.

'But in the present instance that you have just mentioned, I do not see how even this abuse, great as it is, could operate in the way intended.'

'Do you not see? Here is a case of murder, child murder I believe it is. Well, the crime is traced with tolerable certainty to a village; suspicions rest upon it, upon every man and woman in it. If once we can lay hold of the criminal, we know plenty of evidence will be forthcoming; but we cannot fix suspicion on any man in particular. Meantime the whole village community suffers from bad repute; the guilt of blood is upon it, it is disgraced in

the eyes of the neighbourhood. Where is the culprit?—who is he?—is he a poor man or a rich one? Perhaps no man at all, but a woman, whose reputation would be lost for ever were the thing discovered, and she herself subjected to the disgrace of an exposure that would involve all her family in ruin. What are they to do? The crime must be brought home to some individual to remove the stigma and disabilities from the whole, for until it is discovered we make the whole community feel the displeasure of the government in every possible way. Under these circumstances, the whole community put their heads together to find out some one who will act as scapegoat for the rest, and stand the chance of a trial.'

'Chance!' ejaculated Mr. Thurston.

'Yes, it's all a lottery with us, you know, criminal law and civil—all a lottery. However, as I was saying, the people of Chunderbagh have got a man to take the post for the trifling sum of eighteen rupees.'

'At Chunderbagh, you said?' asked Mr. Thurston.

'Take a cheroot, Harley, if you've finished breakfast,' said Mr. Dacres, looking hard at him to see if there were any symptoms of risibility in the muscles of his face.

‘Thank you, I will. But about these Chunderbagh people; it’s a curious case, isn’t it, Dacres?’

‘One of the most extraordinary that ever came to my notice.’

‘But you have not heard the most curious part of it. It is a European that has chosen to put himself in this—very equivocal position, to say the least—and for such a paltry sum.’

Mr. Dacres busied himself in opening his letters that had just been brought in by a chuprassie.

‘And what do you suppose will be the consequences to the man of his indiscretion, to call it by no harsher term?’ stammered Mr. Thurston.

‘Oh, of course he must be tried by the Supreme Court. We shall have to commit him; there is sure to be plenty of evidence; he must be sent to Calcutta, where he will be lodged in jail.’

Mr. Thurston was silent, while the most horrible harrowing suspicions crossed his mind. The native who brought him the money at Chunderbagh, and it was exactly eighteen rupees he had taken, said something about the ‘judge sahib;’ they all seemed extraordinarily anxious for him to take the money, and apparently relieved when they had succeeded in

inducing him to accept it; what they said was all unknown to him. Asiatics were proverbially crafty, and he had read strange stories of the crooked course of Indian criminal law—how dreadful!—how very dreadful! The perspiration streamed from his forehead, and he grew pale as the tablecloth.

At that moment a servant entered with a large public letter, addressed, 'On Public Service Only,' to Mr. Harley, and said the orderly was waiting for an answer. Mr. Harley broke the seal; the contents were two sheets of foolscap written over: he glanced his eye over them, and then exclaimed—

'By Jove, Dacres, here's a go!'

'What is it?' said Mr. Dacres, still perusing his letters.

'You'll excuse us, I know,' said Mr. Harley to Mr. Thurston.

That gentleman bowed slightly.

'Here's a letter from Colonel Wetherall. He says—

'“MY DEAR HARLEY,—Can you make anything of this? It has caused quite a sensation among the men. Read the enclosed letter: perhaps you will be able to find out how the mistake occurred, for mistake it evidently is. —Yours sincerely,

'“R. WETHERALL.”'

‘Then this is the enclosed letter, an official from captain somebody to the adjutant:—

“SIR,—I have the honour to request the favour of your bringing to the notice of Colonel Wetherall that great excitement and some insubordination has been exhibited among the sepoy of my company, especially among the men mentioned in the margin, in consequence of an occurrence that took place among the detachment under command of Ensign Kingsley, while encamped at Chunderbagh. It appears that while the men were cooking their dinner, as stated by Ajit Tewarry, a European, whom he called first a ‘Feringhee,’ until I remonstrated with him for using that expression, came and wittingly trod upon his chula or cooking-place, took some of the cakes of bread off the ground where they were placed ready for eating, and ate a portion of one, offering the remnant to him, Ajit Tewarry, telling him at the same time that he need not be scrupulous and refuse to take it, for very shortly he and all his comrades would be made Christians and forced to eat with Europeans. The matter was not reported, as Ajit Tewarry was sulky about it, and appears to have brooded over the insult, and endeavoured to impress upon the minds of the rest of the sepoy that it was intentionally done. It eventually came

to the notice of the pay-sergeant Toorab Khan, who reported it to me, and I lost no time in making the investigation which has led to my becoming acquainted with the facts as detailed above.”’

‘A very extraordinary story,’ said Dacres, as Harley finished reading the letter and mechanically returned it to the envelope; ‘most extraordinary.’

‘I think I can explain a good deal of this,’ said Mr. Thurston, with a ghastly attempt to smile. ‘I fear I have been the cause, certainly the innocent cause, of all this mischief. I was induced by the representations of Wuly Mahomed to walk up to the spot where one of the sepoys was cooking, and do exactly as is described in that letter; so exactly, indeed, that no doubt can rest on my mind that I am the person alluded to; but I have strong misgivings now about the part Wuly Mahomed has played in the business. He told me I should confer a favour on the men by partaking of their food; and although they did not appear to welcome me, Wuly Mahomed assured me it was only their manner.’

‘Did he say anything to the men?’

‘He was in conversation with them and me the whole time, professedly explaining my observations to them, and theirs to me.’



‘But you did not understand what he said?’

‘No, not thoroughly—that is, not exactly—in fact, not at all.’

‘The thing is as plain as daylight—we must have this Wuly Mahomed,’ said Dacres. Then he added, turning to a chuprassie, ‘Go and fetch this gentleman’s moonshie, Wuly Mahomed, and bring him here. Don’t let him out of your sight, and bring him directly you find him. If there are any papers in his room, bring them too.’

The man bowed and went on his errand. Harley and Dacres walked up and down the room, both smoking rather energetically and looking anxious. Mr. Thurston, after a short delay, arose and went out to assist in the search for his ‘Fidus Achates.’

After about half an hour the chuprassie returned, saying that Wuly Mahomed was nowhere to be found. As Dacres was cross-examining him on the extent to which his search had been carried, Mr. Thurston entered, looking anxious and perplexed.

‘Have they found him?’ was his first question.

‘No, he’s bolted.’

Mr. Thurston started. ‘Then it is he who has robbed me.’

‘Robbed?’

‘ Yes. I find my writing-desk has been abstracted from my portmanteau.’

‘ What did it contain—anything of importance?’

‘ Yes, a vast deal—all my notes on Indian affairs and journals.’

‘ Nothing else?’

‘ Yes, indeed; Bank of Bengal notes to the value of 2,000 rupees, my letters of introduction, and letters of credit to my agents for upwards of 500*l*.’

‘ Whew!’ whistled Harvey.

‘ I thought he’d play you a trick one of these days,’ said Mr. Dacres; ‘ however, Harley, you’ll use your best, I know, to find the thief and recover the stolen property. Meantime, Mr. Thurston, we had better just drive up to Colonel Wetherall and explain matters as well as we can. ‘ Wily’ Mahomed has been too much for us this time. Never mind, we’ll catch him yet. Send your compliments to the colonel, Harley, and say I’ll explain all.’

## CHAPTER X.

WHEN Mr. Dacres and his guest reached Colonel Wetherall's house in cantonments, they learnt that the cause and circumstances of the insubordination exhibited by the sepoy was undergoing investigation by that searching ordeal called a regimental court of enquiry. This imposing conclave consisted of three officers, two subalterns, with Captain Sody as president. Captain Sody was an excellent fellow in his way, but a trifle slow: he was well up to his out-of-door regimental work; he knew to the millionth part of an inch the exact spot upon the trousers which the forefinger of the sepoy standing 'at attention' ought to reach; he was thoroughly conversant with all the ins and outs of that intricate process, the manual and platoon exercise; he could manœuvre a battalion as easily as he could knock about a company in subdivisions, sections, threes, and fours: but to have to sit as member of a court of enquiry or court of requests, or any other court or committee,

with Captain Sody as senior member thereof, was not pleasant. Not that he neglected his duty, good worthy man; he did his best; but his intellect was none of the most capacious, nor was his memory retentive, except in the matter of bugle-calls and words of command. He had studied, with a view to making himself thoroughly acquainted with his duties, the forms of procedure to be adopted in courts martial, and he never could, by any process of reasoning, be brought to see the difference between a court martial and a court of any other kind. The consequence was, that, on the present occasion, he insisted on each member taking an oath and going through all the other formalities observed on those occasions.

He was a slow writer as well as a slow thinker; though I must do him the credit to say that when he did set himself down to think a subject out, he generally came to a wholesome and sound conclusion. When he wrote, he had a trick, acquired at school and never laid aside, of directing, as it seemed, the motion of his pen by corresponding motions of his tongue, which used to protrude about half an inch from between his lips, and move about backwards and forwards and up and down systematically as long as the literary labour continued. His writing was exquisite; a good

bold round-hand, as we used to call it at school, very easy to read, and remarkably free from erasures or blots; though did the latter accidentally befall, the ever-ready tongue was prompt to wipe out all traces of the erratic spot of ink, almost ere it had reached the paper.

The task of collecting and recording the evidence was, as it will readily be believed, a work of considerable time. First the man had to be examined who had shown a spirit of insubordination; then witnesses were examined as to what had really occurred at Chunderbagh; then Mr. Thurston appeared to give his evidence, which again had to be translated, and read out to the prisoner, as Captain Sody, with his deep-rooted impression that he was presiding at a court martial, insisted on calling the principal witness. Mr. Dacres was obliged to come away early, leaving Mr. Thurston to amuse himself as best he might in the mess-room till he was called upon for his statement. At two o'clock the court adjourned to a hot tiffin. Mr. Thurston was courteously invited to join, and that gentleman, before the meal was over, was forced to confess to himself, much against his will, that the officers of the 75th Native Infantry, albeit a Company's regiment, were

as gentlemanly and as hospitable and agreeable a set of fellows as he had met for many a long day.

The court was over at four o'clock, and the impatient member of parliament was glad to get away, and make some enquiries as to the success which had attended Mr. Dacres's and Harley's efforts to apprehend Wuly Mahomed.

He was doomed to disappointment. Not a word could be heard of the delinquent, who was, however, all the time very comfortably lodged in a native officer's hut in the lines of the 75th Native Infantry, where he was taking a little repose preparatory to the journey he contemplated setting out upon, when it became dark, towards the imperial city, Delhi.

No sooner was the court of enquiry over, than Peer Khan, who had been attending as orderly sergeant, repaired to the lines, where he was soon surrounded by a crowd of men all eager to know what had been going on, and what was the result of the conclave. They did not rush out of their huts and surround him, clamouring eagerly for the desired information, as Englishmen or Frenchmen would have done, but by ones and twos they came gradually out of their houses, the crowd increasing as the oracular sergeant walked down the lines, till by the time he had reached

the bottom of them, in an open space in rear of the bells of arms, there was a large assemblage gathered round him. The sergeant here stood, and intimated that he was ready to answer questions.

‘Tell us, brother,’ exclaimed a voice from the crowd, ‘what has happened.’

‘Ah! tell us,’ said another, leaning on an iron-bound staff he carried with him, ‘what said the kaffir Bahadoor court?’

There was a laugh at this.

‘The order of the court is,’ replied the sergeant, speaking as with the voice of authority, ‘that we are no more to make petitions or any complaints about our caste, because the orders of the government are that such shall not be attended to. There is a great man here in the station who has come from England, where he is a member of the Great Assembly, with orders from the Queen of England, who is at enmity with the Company Bahadoor, to see that our caste is destroyed till we eat with Kaffirs. This is what the captain sahib told me.’

Deep but earnest were the curses that might have been heard from the assembled crowd. There was a panic for a moment, till one voice spoke above the rest.

‘And what of the impure cartridges?’

‘We are to have them issued shortly, and to be forced to use them. A regiment of Europeans is on its way here to destroy all who refuse.’

The excitement now became intense, and there seemed every probability that it would exceed restraint, and result in an open outbreak of insubordination. At this juncture a recruit stood forward, and called out in rather a loud voice—

‘I was there all the time as the sahib’s orderly at the court, and heard nothing of this; it is a lie.’

The buzz of voices now became subdued; one or two of the leading men standing near Peer Khan exchanged glances with one another.

‘Salig Ram,’ for such was the recruit’s name, ‘has spoken truth,’ said a grey-haired officer, coming forward. ‘I also was at the court, and heard nothing of all this.’

Peer Khan turned round and angrily confronted the speaker, but appeared to understand by some hidden means of communication that nothing but policy and staunch adherence to the cause had dictated this remark. It produced a wonderful effect, however; for the officer was a man of great influence, and fully trusted. There were no



more open expressions of disgust and insubordination, and by-and-by the crowd began silently to disperse. The man who had before spoken, however, and who was armed with the iron-bound staff—a huge muscular Herculean native of Oude, whose family, from time immemorial, had been lords of the soil in the spot where they were born and bred, and inured by long practice and tradition to deeds of violence and rapine—waved his club over his head, and shouted, ‘Deen, deen!’—‘Faith, our faith!’ The cry acted like magic; in an instant the whole lines were full of sepoys, all rushing about in a frantic and excited manner, shouting, ‘Deen, deen!’

‘Curse on you, you fools!’ exclaimed the officer, rushing to the spot where the crowd seemed thickest, and making frantic gesticulations to the men to be silent; ‘you will spoil all.’

Peer Khan, too, frightened at the spirit he had raised, aided the native officer in his endeavours to procure silence. Their joint efforts were at last successful. The men were silent, but they might have been seen all the rest of the afternoon walking or standing about in groups in the centre streets, or outside their houses, talking earnestly to one another. At length the warning bugle for evening parade

sent them all to their huts for their accoutrements.

In the meantime the native officer had enquired of Peer Khan what sepoy lived in the same hut as Salig Ram, the recruit.

He was told the name, and then desired that the man might be sent to him.

The man went, and was closeted for about a quarter of an hour with his superior. He then returned to his own hut. That evening, after Salig Ram had concluded his evening meal, he was seized with violent sickness and purging, and sent off straight to hospital. The native doctor, who had pretty much his own way in all hospital arrangements, and who was a bigoted Hindoo of high caste, received him and gave him some medicine, and there he remained in spite of the skill of the medical officer of the regiment, Dr. Mactartan, who saw him regularly, with other patients, morning and evening, but who could not imagine how it was that the prescribed remedies produced no effect whatever upon the perverse constitution of Salig Ram.

Colonel Wetherall, like many another men in his position at that critical period, was much puzzled how to act. That the spirit of disaffection had inoculated his regiment he felt morally certain, though if called upon for

proof he would have found it exceedingly difficult to advance any; and he sometimes used to ask himself, as he paced, in anxious and thoughtful mood, up and down his verandah, 'What reason have I for feeling so much anxiety and concern? I can give no proof that the men are not animated with the best possible spirit towards myself and the government. They are more than usually attentive to their duties, more than usually respectful, and, as far as their language and bearing and behaviour towards myself and the other officers go, nothing could be more satisfactory. I may be deceived, but it is scarcely possible.' The straightforward honesty of the English character has always been the most efficient weapon to oppose to Asiatic cunning and intrigue. He had several times thought of summoning the native officers to his presence and reasoning with them openly on the subject, by which he fully trusted he would be able to convince them of the folly of their fears, and of the absurdity of the reports which were so mischievously prevalent. But, on the other hand, he felt unwilling to begin the subject, as by doing so he would necessarily admit the existence of a feeling the presence of which it was politic to ignore as long as possible.

The slight disturbance mentioned above

served as an excuse for Colonel Wetherall to do what he had so long wished. Next day the sergeant-major, in bringing the morning report, informed him that the evening before a great deal of excitement had been caused in the lines by means of some man shouting out 'Deen, deen!' When asked to name the man or to give such a description of him as would lead to his identification, he replied that that was utterly impossible—he had no idea who he was, nor was it in his power to find out. The colonel then desired that all the native officers should be summoned to his quarters in sword and sash. The sergeant-major went to give the order: the colonel waited.

Meantime Graham dropped in, to ask for a few days' leave to go out shooting, as he said. This was soon granted, and he was about to leave; but the colonel detained him.

'Stay a minute or two, if you have no particular business elsewhere. I have sent for the native officers, to speak to them seriously about the disturbance in the lines yesterday. I would have liked to have had the other officers here; but never mind, we won't wait for them; now you are here, you can stay. What a deal of mischief that fellow has done!'

'What fellow?'

‘That Mr. What’s-his-name, the M.P. who is staying with the commissioner. He seems to have been guilty of some unpardonable piece of folly, interfering with the sepoy’s at their dinner, and treading on their chulas.’

‘I don’t suppose he knew what a “chula” was.’

‘Then he should have stayed at home, and not come to this country, when he does not understand the people or their customs—making mischief.’

‘I hear his moonshei, who it seems did all the real mischief, has bolted.’

‘Yes, he and Dacres were here yesterday, and told me all about it. I wish I could lay hands on that fellow; he is a regular deep designing villain.’

The native officers were announced, and so the conversation ended. Colonel Wetherall received them standing, as they came in and grouped themselves round the table.

‘I have sent for you,’ said the colonel, in a tone of authority and kindness combined, as he stood erecting his manly and soldierlike figure to its full height, and looking steadily into their faces,—‘I have sent for you because I want to speak with you. I have been near thirty years with you, and you know me well.’

They interrupted him to remark, 'that he, the colonel, was their father and mother, and they hoped he would soon become a general, and, finally, a lord.'

The colonel went on without heeding them. 'I have been many years with you, and you know I have always been your friend. Most of you who are standing here I have known as sepoys, and you have almost all received your commissions directly from my hands.'

'It was true,' they said; 'who could doubt that he, the colonel, the nourisher of the poor, was the bestower of their daily bread, their sole support in life?'

The confabulation, interrupted as it was repeatedly by remarks of this sort, is too long to repeat: suffice it to say that the colonel went on to tell them how that it could not be concealed that there was much excitement abroad, and designing men had been poisoning the minds of the natives against their English rulers, who had no intentions but what were open and straightforward, and that he had heard that there had been the evening before a disturbance in the lines, important as it assumed a religious character; that he believed they had most of them exerted themselves to put it down, (the colonel was guilty of something very like a pious fraud here,) and he wished to

impress on their minds the gross absurdity of the reports that were abroad, to the effect that the government had designs against their caste and religion, and to point out to them how inevitably any attempt at open disaffection must result in the annihilation of the originators of it, and how that he trusted that the 75th would maintain the reputation it had always held, and be a bright example to the rest of the army.

The native officers, when the colonel gave them an opportunity for speaking, declaimed with the strongest possible asseveration of truth, that there was no shadow of discontent among the men: there had been a disturbance owing to the wild report set on foot by the sepoy who brought the charge against Mr. Thurston of spoiling his dinner, an evil-disposed and mischievous man whom they recommended the colonel to get rid of, (poor colonel! as if red tape and the adjutant-general would allow him to expel a designing conspirator from his ranks!) but that now all excitement had been allayed, and the colonel might depend on the 75th Regiment, for how could anything go wrong when all the native officers were resolutely determined to do their duty? 'And here is Graham Sahib,' added the spokesman of the party, a grey-haired old subadar,

the senior native officer present, named Gunga Singh, turning with a look of affection and at the same time respect on the young officer— ‘I recollect well when he was born, and often have I dandled him in my arms and played with him when a child. General Graham Sahib, the sahib’s father, first took me by the hand when I was a boy, and got me enlisted and promoted, and was a father to me. Shall we not be faithful to such officers, whose fathers have been fathers to us, and we their children? Yes, we swear by the water of the Holy Ganges, we will.’

The rest all murmured assent as the old man finished.

‘Surely there cannot be treachery in the hearts of these men,’ said Colonel Wetherall as they left to return to the lines. ‘Whatever may happen in other regiments, ours, I know, will be all right.’



## CHAPTER XI.

EVER since the little occurrence at the picnic, Graham had felt half inclined to quarrel with his friend Burleigh,—why, he could not exactly tell. It so happened that accident had not thrown them together: he did not feel inclined to court Burleigh's society, or to go to his house and look him up; and Burleigh never came near him. It was a foolish feeling, but somehow it did annoy him to see his friend's buggy drive past his house, as it did almost daily. He knew very well where he was going. Stevens's house was down the road, and Burleigh had to pass Graham's door to get to it. Why shouldn't he look in as he went by, or invite himself to dine at the mess with him, as he used?

They had made an engagement some time before, to go out together for a few days' shooting to Chunderbagh, before the hot weather set in. The season would soon be too far advanced; indeed, it was even now uncomfortably hot in the daytime, and Graham

determined to postpone his expedition no longer; he would go and have his day or two's shooting, but, under the circumstances, he thought he should enjoy his holiday more alone, than with Burleigh for a companion. So he made up his mind to go, and broached the subject to the colonel, as related in the last chapter.

Leaving his traps to follow, he took his gun and one servant, and rode out that evening to Chunderbagh, and put up at the dâk bungalow. The sun had set, and he was strolling about in the vicinity of the building, while the never-failing dâk-bungalow dinner, a grilled fowl, was being prepared, when he observed a large crowd of natives collected round a well under the clump of trees a few hundred yards from the spot where he was standing. On coming up to them, he enquired what was the matter, and was told that a man had fallen down the well. Graham went to the edge, and looked down; and there, sure enough, just discernible in the darkness at the bottom of the well, appeared the head of a human being.

'Who is he?' asked Graham from the crowd that had made way for him at his approach.

'My father,' replied a strong, robust young man of about twenty-five or thirty years of age, who was holding in one hand the end of a

long rope, the other end of which had been let down the well.

‘Your father, you brute!’ said Graham, utterly disgusted, but still amused at the coolness with which the son regarded the awkward position of his parent. ‘Then why don’t you go down and get him up? you stand here and see your father drowned without making an effort to save him!’

‘He has the rope.’

‘The rope—yes, and perhaps his arms are broken, or he is badly hurt, or senseless from the fall. How old is he?’

‘A very old man,’ said half-a-dozen voices, for the rest had now gathered close round the stranger, exhibiting much more curiosity to hear what the sahib was saying, than to find out how the old man was getting on, or to make any attempt at rescuing him.

At this moment a heart-rending appeal for help, like the wail of a lost spirit, ascended from the bottom of the well. The natives crowded closer round; those in front stooped, and peered down.

‘He is dying!’

‘Assuredly.’

‘He is dead by this time!’

‘Ram, Ram, Ram!’

‘It is fate.’

While the crowd contented themselves with expressing their sympathies in this manner, the son of the man who was the object of them exhibited his filial affection by giving the rope a jerk every now and then, to see if his fish had taken the bait, and it was time to haul in.

‘You heartless wretches!’ said Graham; ‘will none of you go down and fetch him up? The man’s dying!’

‘The well is very deep,’ said a voice out of the crowd—the rest were silent.

Graham could stand it no longer. He snatched the rope out of the man’s hand, examined it well, and found it was stout and strong, and would bear a good weight.

‘Here, take hold of the rope,’ he said, four or five of you—I’ll go down—hold fast, and when you hear me call, pull up—slowly, mind.’

After making sure that they understood his directions, he laid hold of the rope, and went down hand-over-hand to the bottom, steadying himself with his feet against the side. Here he found about five feet of water.

The old man with considerable difficulty kept his mouth just above the surface: he was very old, and probably injured by the fall; for when Graham asked him if he had sufficient strength to hold on while he was

being pulled up, he shook his head, and seemed to have abandoned himself to despair.

‘I must get you up somehow, old chap,’ said Graham, and then proceeded to do the best he could under the circumstances. The rope was strong enough to hold them both, and there were plenty of men above. He looked up, and could see their faces peering over the mouth of the well, where they were all chattering away as hard as they could like monkeys.

There was no time to be lost, for the old man was getting weaker and weaker; so he managed to slip the end of the rope under him, so as to make a loop in which he could sit securely as long as he had strength to hold firmly on with his hands, and fastened it with a good knot. The returning hopes of life imparted nerve and vigour to his aged companion, and after seeing that he was as safe as he could make him, and holding on with both hands in the full consciousness that his life depended on the strength of the grip, Graham climbed a little way above him, so as to be able to rest his foot upon the knot, and aid his hands in the labour of sustaining his weight, and called out lustily to the natives above to draw up. They seemed to work with a will, for the ascent was rapid, and in

less than a minute he found himself seized by strong hands and arms, and the old man below him as well, and landed on *terra firma*. Great was the exultation of the crowd, and loud their exclamations at Graham's courage,—‘bahadoori,’ as they called it. As for the old man, they crowded round him, and embraced him like one restored to them from the dead.

Anxious to escape their boisterous gratitude, and to change his clothes—for up to his middle he was one mass of mud, and wet through—he made his way through the crowd, and returned to the dâk bungalow. His things were not to come up till very late, so he had to keep on his wet clothes till they arrived.

In the evening after dinner, Graham was sitting in the verandah smoking. The dinner, such as it was, had been discussed, and the servants had all retired to the cook-room to have a good smoke and a good chat together over the exciting event of the day, the rescue of the old man from the well, and the ‘sahib’s’ bravery and kindness in having ventured down to fetch him up—a feat that raised Graham, in their estimation, to an extraordinary elevation. He was in a reverie, thinking if the truth must be told about the charms of the goddess he worshipped, though he

declared over and over again to himself that he would worship her no more. His attention was suddenly drawn to the figure of a man creeping cautiously round the corner of the house. He sat still and watched the intruder on his silence and solitude. He advanced, and Graham beheld the figure of the old peasant who had so shortly before been indebted to him for saving his life.

‘Extraordinary,’ thought he; ‘the old man is coming to express his gratitude.’

He was right; the old man came up, and after making a low salaam, pressed his forehead against the young officer’s knees.

‘Well,’ said Graham, ‘how are you—have you recovered from the effects of your fall?’

‘Alla be praised!’ said the old man. ‘It was Alla sent the sahib to my rescue. I had no hurt; no bones broken; only a few bruises. I have come to speak to the sahib, if the Sahib will listen.’

‘Certainly,’ said the other, rather pleased at having something to distract his attention from the melancholy and moody thoughts that had filled his mind: ‘come and sit down here,’ pointing to the verandah, ‘and tell me what you have to say.’

‘The sahib has saved my life,’ he said, seating himself on the stone—‘the sahibs are

wonderful men; will the sahib believe what I say?’

‘That depends,’ thought Graham. ‘Speak, and I shall know,’ he added, aloud.

‘The sahib has done for me to-day what my own son would not do: how should I hide what is to his advantage to know? There are evil men about, wicked men who are plotting to do the sahibs injury, to destroy them; but I will save the sahib that saved my life.’

‘How is my life in danger—who threatens it?’

‘From the four quarters of heaven, from the seven climes there are foes to the sahibs coming—all ready to strike; will the sahib be warned?’

‘If it is written in the book of destiny that we are to perish, why should I attempt to save my life?’

‘Ah, it is not written in the book of your destiny, sahib: others will fall—you shall be saved.’

‘How so?’

‘Listen. Before many days are passed, you will hear of something that will turn your heart into water: every man around you will be changed suddenly into a deadly foe, thirsting for your life. Read this—here is a paper, and here is another; I have had them by me

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for many days: there have been many circulated in Islamabad; and all the people put faith in them.'

'And do you—what is it all about?'

'When the sahib has time, then he can read them; but let him keep them to himself. I have read them, and all the people in Chunderbagh village have read them. The King of Roos and the Badshah of Iran have sent them to us. Is it true—are the King of Roos and the Badshah of Iran at war with the English?'

'The English have been at war with them, but now there is peace.'

'Ah, this peace will not last long. Are there any European soldiers at Islamabad?'

'Not one.'

'Are there any coming?'

'None that I know of.'

'Alla have mercy on you! but listen. The time will come when you will want a hiding-place; then come to me. I will be waiting for you by day and by night under the peepul tree close to the great tomb; come to me, and I will save you.'

'How?'

'I know secrets which no man else knows: that tomb of the Saiyad is a wonderful place, and the Saiyad preserves all those that take refuge under it.'

‘But how shall I know when danger is at hand?’ asked Graham, whose attention was now thoroughly aroused—‘how shall I know when is the proper time to save myself by flight?’

‘The sahib will find that out quite plainly enough.’

‘But tell me more about it—if, as you say, you are really interested in my welfare, why not tell me all, so that I may be able to avoid the danger beforehand, and save myself and friends?’

‘I have no more to say; I can tell nothing but what I have said; when it comes, recollect Rahman Khan of Chunderbagh and the peepul tree. And now may I go?’

‘Yes, if you wish it.’

‘What are these papers, I wonder?’ said Graham to himself as soon as he was alone. ‘It will be something for me to do to puzzle them out.’

He went inside and examined the documents. They were written in Persian. He was a very tolerable Oriental scholar, and could read Persian documents, though not very fluently; still he could manage to spell out the meaning of the words before him. After a great deal of trouble, and beginning first of all in the middle, then at the end, and finally

commencing from the first line, he read it all through to the last. The following is a loose translation of the contents. The first ran thus:—

‘To all the Faithful—the followers of the Prophet of Islam, on whom and on whose descendants be peace. Amen.—Be it known that it has been decreed, and sealed in the archives of heaven, that the day of the destruction of the Nazarene is fast approaching. These people, hated and accursed of Alla and the Prophet, have filled up the cup of their crimes and iniquities to the brim. When the time comes, the king of kings, the centre of Islam, &c. &c., will issue his firman from the throne of the empire of Hindustan; and, the signal being given, let the faithful draw the sword of religion and sweep off the infidels from the face of the earth, and drive their souls to hell.’

There was a seal and a signature to this document, which was illegible.

The other ran as follows, the exordium being in the same style as the last:—‘Be it known, &c., that the king of kings, the ruler of Hindustan, the light of Islam, &c., has this day been blessed with a royal letter from the mighty and powerful King of Iran, which tells him that the infidel English Nazarenes have

been destroyed from the face of the earth of his country Iran, where these infidels, in defiance of God and the Prophet, had impiously dared to set foot; and that the great King of Iran and the omnipotent Emperor of Roos are marching with large bodies of invincible troops to the country of Hindustan, where they will complete the utter destruction of the infidel English Nazarenes, and re-establish the faith of Islam and the ancient religion of the Hindoos in all their purity. Let the sword of faith remain quiet in the sheath of caution till the firman of Alla commands it to be drawn.'

Graham folded up these precious documents and locked them up in his writing-desk. He was in no mood for sleep, so he lit another cheroot and walked up and down the verandah thinking.

'After all, that old fellow's caution may not be thrown away. The peepul tree—I don't recollect it; I may as well be walking there as up and down the verandah—so I'll go.'

He went inside, snatched up his hat and stick, and, putting his revolver in his pocket, sauntered out in the direction of the tomb.

What with the excitement attending the gloomy forebodings of the old man, and the labour of deciphering the manuscript, &c.,

Graham had not observed how time had slipped by. Who has not found himself, walking up and down the room or the verandah, when reflecting intently on some subject of great interest, more especially if the allurements of a cheroot be added to keep up the delusion, that half an hour—nay, one hour—may pass without being noticed at all? It was the case with Graham; and so full was his mind of all he had heard and read, added to the subject of cogitation that had pretty well filled it before, that he was quite unaware of the fact; but by the time he reached the neighbourhood of the tomb, only a few minutes' walk from the dâk bungalow, it was close upon the witching hour of midnight.

Now it so happened that this was the very night which had been fixed upon for the Nawab to come and test the truth of the message brought him by the mysterious visitor, as related in a previous chapter. He had fasted tolerably consistently ever since—that is, according to Mahometan rules of fasting—taking nothing till after sundown; and what with the reduction of his natural strength, and the effect of weakness of body upon the brain and nervous system, and the strain to which his mind had been subjected ever since, acted upon as it was by the heightening of

the imaginative faculties in consequence of his abstinence from proper food, the Nawab had certainly done the very best to render himself amenable to anything in the shape of a ghost or a spectre, or a visitation, or a revelation from Heaven, or anything mysterious and out of the way that might be conjured up for his special behoof.

Graham had very soon satisfied himself of the presence and site of the peepul tree, and feeling at last sleepy and tired, was thinking of returning to the dâk bungalow to prepare for rising with the dawn the following morning, when his attention was attracted by observing two horsemen approach the spot. They halted within a hundred yards or so of the tomb, and dismounted. One of them then threw his horse's bridle to the other to hold, and walked leisurely towards the tomb. Graham was obscured by the shade of the trees, and feeling his curiosity a little excited, determined to follow the stranger. As the latter entered the tomb by one door, Graham entered it by another, and the only other one, for the tomb was enclosed on two sides and open on two. He walked very cautiously in, taking care to keep himself under the shade of the wall. When he got inside, all was black as Erebus, the only thing he could distinguish being the

other doorway on the side contiguous to that by which he had entered, and, in bold relief with the light of the outer air (though it was night) behind him, the figure of a man standing erect in an attitude of attention. He scanned his outline attentively. He was tall and well dressed, and armed, as far as he could distinguish from the shape of the figure before him. By-and-by he moved, then knelt in the Mahometan fashion and commenced muttering his prayers. He appeared to grow excited with his devotion, for he continued to pray louder and louder, till at last he spoke loud enough to awaken the echoes of the old tomb, and disturb sundry kites, pigeons, and other birds that had long ago quietly disposed of themselves for the night.

Leaving the ordinary forms of the Mahometan ritual, the Nawab began at last to pray in his excitement audibly in Hindustanee. 'Oh, holy Saiyad,' he exclaimed, 'blessed follower of the Prophet, on whom be the blessing of Alla, appear if thou art destined to appear to the faithful follower and slave who awaits at the holy threshold of thy tomb the manifestation of thy will and the will of Alla.'

Graham watched the scene now with the greatest interest, but, while listening intently

to the words that fell from the lips of the devotee, was suddenly startled by a tremendous burst of thunder, as it seemed to him to be at the moment, though on recalling the sound afterwards he remembered that it was more like a rattling of old pots and kettles on a larger scale than any meteorological phenomenon. The frightened birds screamed and flew out of the tomb by fifties; pieces of old plaster and dust and filth fell from the roof in showers; and, what with the noise and confusion, and dust, he felt half inclined to follow the example of the birds, and get out of the place as speedily as possible. Curiosity, however, kept him. No sooner had the hubbub subsided, than there appeared a brilliant light in the tomb, proceeding from the dark side of it, and almost immediately afterwards a highly-coloured transparent figure of a man, in the costume which our ancestors would have called 'Moorish'—that is to say, with flowing robes of all the colours of the rainbow, loose trousers, a long beard, a green turban, a scimeter, round rolling eyes that moved about restlessly in the sockets. An instant's reflection (for he was, it must be allowed, taken aback at first) convinced Graham that he was being treated to a magic lantern show or a dissolving view, the figure before him being



one that had probably done duty for many years, in distant lands and other climes, for the old hero of romance, Blue Beard. The Nawab's consternation on beholding the sudden apparition, and finding himself thus abruptly *vis à vis* with the ghost of the Saiyad, for it could be none else, cannot be described. He threw himself upon the ground in the humble posture of Mahometan supplication, and hid his face in his hands.

By-and-by, the spectre stopped rolling his eyes, raised his arm, and—began to speak. It was Graham's turn to be startled now, for the apparition seemed certainly to be endowed with the faculty of speech. 'Rise, Nawab,' it said, in a hollow sepulchral tone befitting an inmate of the grave where the mortal remains of the holy man had long ago crumbled into dust; 'fear not, beloved of Heaven, beloved of Alla and the Prophet. Thou art here in obedience to the mandate of the heavenly messenger, after fasting seven days, and it is to such as thee that the will of Heaven is revealed. To the unbelieving no sign is granted, for to read the signs of the Great One faith is required. Be this, then, a sign to thee, that the spirit of the ever-blessed Saiyad hath been permitted to revisit earth to communicate to thee the will of Heaven.'

‘Amen, amen!’ gasped the Nawab, supporting himself on his knees.

‘Thou art the chosen of Alla, and thy name is written down by the angel Gabriel, at the direction of the holy Prophet, in the book as the second sword of God: thou knowest who was named the first. To thee it is given to lead the jehad, to annihilate the infidels, and to establish the holy religion of the Prophet in the centre of the universe, Hindustan. Pay thy allegiance to the Badshah who reigns at Delhi, the royal city, and will be proclaimed in a few days’ time, and draw the sword for “Deen,” and let no infidel escape thee.’

‘Amen, amen!’ responded the Nawab again. ‘The will of Alla is supreme—who now can doubt Thee?’

‘I have spoken,’ continued the spectre; ‘let the will of Alla be obeyed. I go.’

Graham had heard and seen quite enough by this time to understand that he had accidentally become a witness of some extraordinary jugglery, the end and aim of which it was not difficult to perceive, though the machinery by which it was effected was not by any means so clear. Determined, however, that he would do his best to disabuse the mind of the Nawab (for he had subsequently discerned who he was) as much as possible

before the spectre disappeared, he drew his revolver, and, still keeping under the shade of the wall, took a deliberate and careful aim at the spot where he calculated the focus of the lens was, and where he would be able to smash the apparatus, if it was indeed a magic lantern that was being operated with. The report of the revolver sounded within the walls of the tomb like that of a nine-pounder: there was a flash and smoke; again the birds fled, screaming and flapping their wings, out of the place, striking Graham's head and the Nawab's as they fled by, and knocking down the dust and plaster; but the spectre disappeared in proper spectre-like fashion—that is to say, instantaneously—and a simultaneous sound of crashing glass and pieces of metal falling on the stone floor told Arthur plainly enough that his shot had taken effect. Upon the Nawab it had most decidedly taken effect; for, with a yell as if all the host of the unseen world had been suddenly let loose upon him, he jumped up and rushed out of the tomb. With rapid strides, and most undignified and unoriental haste, he made for his horse, snatched the bridle from the hands of the attendant (who was almost as frightened as his master), leapt on the animal's back, and galloped off as hard as he could for Islamabad,


closely followed by his servant. Determined to follow up his advantage, Graham rushed off to the dâk bungalow, and soon returned with a light. He preferred following out his investigation alone, and therefore summoned none of the dâk-bungalow servants to attend him. On entering the tomb, he found that the most elaborate preparations had preceded the exhibition he had just witnessed. A white cloth was stretched across a portion of the tomb on which the figure had appeared: behind this there was nothing at first visible, for all this part of the tomb was walled up, and had been so from time immemorial; but the wall had fallen into disrepair—stones had tumbled out in many places, had been taken out in others; in fact, the whole place looked so like a mass of rubbish, that no one had ever dreamed of enquiring the use of, and the date since which the internal structure had been erected. Graham went and looked carefully along the ground just under the heap of stones that did duty for a wall. There he found in one spot fragments of glass, a small piece of tin and bronze; but nothing else. This, however, was sufficient; for in looking above he found a hole in the masonry just large enough to admit the lens of a good-sized magic lantern. He looked in, but could

distinguish nothing, and, failing after a diligent search in finding anything else that could serve as a clue to the mystery, he resolved to content himself with his trophies—to wit, the cloth and the pieces of glass, and carefully wrapping them up, he put the precious bundle under his arm and returned to the dâk bungalow.

He had too much to communicate to spend any more time at Chunderbagh; so rousing his sleepy servant, he desired him to saddle his horse, and bidding his servant return next morning at daylight to cantonments, he set out on his homeward course. Before dawn next morning he had related to Colonel Wetherall all that had passed, and the colonel without more ado drove down to Mr. Dacres to communicate the intelligence to him, and take counsel as to the course they should pursue.

## CHAPTER XII.

THE following morning Mr. Thurston had an appointment with Mr. Harley to attend at that gentleman's office while the usual business of the 'kutchery' was being carried on, for the express purpose of acquiring information and making notes on the procedure of civil and criminal law as conducted in the Company's courts. Mr. Harley, however, did not go to kutchery (or to court, as it is becoming the fashion now to call it) until 10 A.M. Mr. Thurston accordingly had ample leisure for transacting a little private business of his own that morning. This consisted in a visit to the shop, or office, or store, whichever the reader likes, kept by the firm of Cork, Screw, and Co., Islamabad. These gentlemen drove a thriving trade. They dealt in what are called 'Europe goods,' that is to say, every conceivable article, liquid or solid, edible or non-edible, that could come under the category : they were drapers, shoe and leather sellers, grocers, druggists, chandlers, provi-



sioners, wine-merchants, haberdashers, booksellers, stationers, cutlers, upholsterers, confectioners, horse-dealers, carriage-dealers, hatters, clothiers, milliners, commission agents, jewellers, goldsmiths, auctioneers, &c. &c., all in one. In fact, you might walk from St. Paul's to Charing Cross, and from Hyde Park Corner to Holborn Hill, and make a purchase at every shop you passed on either side of the street, and you would be sure to find a similar article in the store of Messrs. Cork, Screw, and Co., of Islamabad. Time would fail me to enumerate even the genera of the stock-in-trade of this enterprising firm, much less each species. They enjoyed a monopoly at Islamabad, that is, a monopoly as European tradesmen. There were several shops of a similar though inferior kind kept by native dealers: there was Nubbee Bux and Hoosain Bux, and half-a-dozen other Buxes, whose shops were filled with a heap of articles, if possible, more miscellaneous than those of their more opulent rivals: but their goods were for the most part ancient; they had shelves heaped up with tins of preserved salmon, meats, soups, &c. &c., which had been known to occupy the same position as they held in 1857 from a period coeval with the memory of the oldest inhabitant. Their prices were

generally speaking lower than in the European store: but it was a serious business making a bargain with them. It was a whole morning's work to complete the purchase of a single article, for they began by asking double the price the customers knew they would take. They had therefore to practise all the arts and cunning of professed horse-dealers; to fence with the subject of the price, threaten to leave the shop at least half-a-dozen times, return, upbraid, scold, entreat, reason, and, in fact, put their mental energies to the utmost stretch. In addition to the inconvenience of going through this long process, every man or woman who entered the shop was dogged and followed about by one of the retainers of the owners, who watched the slightest movement of the customer (though he might be thoroughly well known to them, and may have been in the habit of dealing with them for years) with catlike eyes, as if every Englishman imbibed the propensity of shoplifting with his mother's milk, and visited such repositories with the sole idea of seeing how many things he could steal. Far different was it with Messrs. Cork, Screw, and Co., the two former of whom (for I must plead total ignorance regarding the Co., whose



whereabouts and identity were never, that I ever heard of, even approximately guessed at) had been born and bred in respectable society in England, Mr. Cork having been educated for the law, while Mr. Screw was the hopeful progeny of a country surgeon. They had a way of doing business or of keeping a store that was quite gentlemanly and free and easy: this was to be expected, seeing that they came from exactly the same rank of society originally as most of their customers, and had only placed themselves temporarily in the inferior position of shopkeepers because they wanted and intended to make speedy fortunes and retire to England, where they would purchase estates in the country, and where they would be able, thanks to the acquisition of money, that great leveller of all distinctions, to hold up their heads with the best families in the county. That they bid fair to realise this inviting prospect, may be understood when I state that their ordinary rates of profit were three hundred per cent. Anything under this they looked upon as slow and slack.

Enjoying a monopoly as they did, they were determined to enjoy it thoroughly; for it was not the custom of the firm of Messrs. Cork, Screw, and Co. to do anything by halves.

Accordingly they did not put themselves to any inconvenience in the way of attending to the shop. If you called at a certain time in the morning when these gentlemen had been out for their morning ride, had imbibed their morning cup of tea and smoked their morning cheroots, you might chance to find one or other in the shop and ready to answer enquiries ; which answers, to do them justice, would be given with the utmost civility and good breeding : but if you called a little later, or in the middle of the day, when it was much too hot to walk across from the house to the shop, you would be told by an attendant chuprassie, that the 'durwaza' was 'bund,' that is to say, the shop was shut (*Anglicè*, the shutters were up). In the evening it was generally the same, as then the firm went out for their evening drive ; the afternoon was equally unfavourable for anything like shopping, for that was a period of the day when Messrs. Cork, Screw, and Co. liked to repose after tiffin. The fact was, they argued, 'everything in India is done by writing : the government in council is carried on by foolscap and pen and ink ; why should not shopping be managed in the same way ? In this depressing climate, why should a European vendor of Europe goods reduce his weight

and weaken his constitution by standing about to show articles that a customer had no need in reality to see before purchasing, and answering queries as to the price of this or that, when the whole transaction could be performed so much more easily by means of a note of three lines?—"Captain So-and-so would be glad if Messrs. Cork and Screw would send him such and such things." The business was then confined to a perusal of the note, and an order to a chuprassie to get the article required, to pack it and send it: the baboo made out the bill, and Messrs. Cork and Screw scrawled their signatures at the bottom, and the thing was done, and might be done without either members of the firm rising from that recumbent position which it is deemed necessary for the benefit of the constitution of so many Englishmen and Europeans in India to occupy during twenty twenty-fourths of the day.

There was, however, a very manifest advantage in dealing with the European firm over the native. Some thrifty people who had but little money to spare, used to make a point of dealing with the Nubby Buxes under the delusive belief that they saved by doing so. Time being no object to many customers, officers in the army and others, they could

afford to spend an hour in squabbling with the native dealer, and thought themselves amply repaid if they saved a rupee in ten by so doing; but I question whether the economy was sound: for, in the first place, the wear and tear on the constitution and temper must go for something; in the second, there was a very great chance of the article purchased turning out badly; and, thirdly, if they made a good bargain five times, the sixth, the chances were, was such a bad one as to compensate for the advantages gained on the first five. At the European store, on the other hand, though they did 'stick it on,' as it is called, you were sure of getting good articles, and sure of meeting with civility. Store-keeping in India, in fact, is a very gentlemanly kind of trading, and when you come to think that a man starting with a little capital, and being honest, industrious, and punctual in business matters, and well supported by good agents in England who understand the wants of the Indian market, may easily make his twenty or thirty thousand pounds in ten or twelve years, the reader will admit that the line is not such a bad one after all. Everybody has heard the story of the Calcutta tailor who threatened a scapegrace son with the punishment of a commission in the army, and

not without cause. If two men start together in life in India, one in the army and the other in the store line, the former may, while on a visit to England as a captain on his furlough, after ten years' service, and with his furlough pay of one hundred and ninety-one pounds per annum, perhaps be invited by the latter to pay him a visit at his country seat, and have a little shooting over his estate.

But Messrs. Cork, Screw, and Co. had other irons in the fire: they were agents for the great Nogo Bullock Train Company, which ran carts all the way from Calcutta to Peshawur, and to and from all intermediate stations, and undertook to transport the goods of the public at a much lower rate than the Government Bullock Train. At each of the intermediate stations, the company had agents; and these agents were gentlemen engaged in similar business to that of Cork, Screw, and Co.

The advantage of the arrangement was, that all the agents being shareholders, they were able to get their goods up from Calcutta at half the rates they would have had to pay, had they employed any other carrying company, and could always insure a tolerably speedy and regular conveyance for them: when it so happened that there were no goods of their own to be forwarded, they would employ the

carts, which would otherwise have been empty, in the conveyance of some of the boxes and packages entrusted to their care by a confiding public; so they could always make sure of having their own stores up speedily and cheaply, and at the same time always had profitable work for the train when there were no stores to come.

Now it so happened that Mr. Thurston had confided his boxes, consisting of all the baggage he had, over and above the light *impedimenta* which he took in the dâk carriage with him, to the agent of the Nogo train at Calcutta; the boxes had been legibly addressed in letters an inch and a half long to 'Islamabad,' and as the agent had assured him that they would only take a few days in transit, Mr. Thurston, who was the more anxious to receive his boxes in consequence of Wuly Mahomed's treachery, repaired on the morning in question to the establishment of Messrs. Cork, Screw, and Co., to institute enquiries.

He was fortunate enough to find Mr. Cork in the counting-house, and accordingly he addressed himself to that individual, stating his name and business.

Mr. Cork politely assured him he would immediately obtain the desired information, and forthwith commenced to search in large

mysterious-looking ledgers, each page of which was ruled in the most complex manner it was possible to conceive.

‘I really think, sir,’ said Mr. Cork, looking up from his ledgers with a smile of satisfaction, ‘that your packages have arrived. Here, baboo!’ A weight was removed from Mr. Thurston’s mind at this announcement.

In obedience to the call of Mr. Cork, a sleek, cleanly-dressed, and rather fat baboo presented himself, with one pen behind each ear, and another in his hand.

‘Baboo, do you know anything about six packages marked Islamabad, left Nunkumpore on the 15th?’

‘What name?’

‘Thurston,’ replied that gentleman, much pleased with the favourable specimen of Asiatic sharpness and aptitude for business evinced by the baboo.

‘Ah, Thurston, master’s name? Yes, I recollect, six boxes?’

‘Yes, six.’

‘All addressed—very big letters—dam big letters?’

‘Yes, exceedingly large letters.’

‘And name?’

‘Thurston,’ again replied that gentleman.

‘Six packages, you say, sir?’

‘Yes.’

‘Ah, all gone.’

‘Gone!’ said Mr. Thurston, supposing they had been sent up to Mr. Dacres, and indulging in a momentary and delightful dream of their being all laid out ready for unpacking.

‘Gone!’ said Mr. Cork, his wider experience giving rise to a qualm in his breast; ‘where to?’

‘Where to?—Peshawur, sir.’

‘Peshawur!’ shrieked the unhappy owner.

‘Peshawur!’ repeated Mr. Cork, despairingly.

‘Yes, master. Me see boxes, one day, two day, in godown. No gentleman want—carts go empty—no goods—me say, forty carts go empty—me send boxes, fill the carts; then, if wanted, can come back when carts empty.’

‘You—black—’ here Mr. Thurston, who, I am sorry to say, had inadvertently committed himself to an extent altogether unseemly in a philanthropist, checked his rising wrath, and turned to Mr. Cork—

‘This is a most extraordinary, unjustifiable proceeding, sir: the boxes are legibly addressed to Islamabad, and your agent or factotum sends them on to Peshawur just because he wants to fill the carts!’

‘I am really extremely sorry for the mis-



take, sir,' urged Mr. Cork in his blandest manner. 'We labour under great disadvantages in this country in being forced to employ native agency: the mistake shall be rectified as soon as possible. Baboo, send telegraph to the next station and have these boxes sent back.'

'That no good, sir—boxes gone on through cart—not unpacked till reach Peshawur. Me write to agents at Peshawur. Agent send boxes back—arrive all safe, sir—no fear.'

'And pray how long shall I be kept waiting while these cur—carts are going to Peshawur and back again?'

'How long, baboo, will it take to come back from Peshawur?' said Mr. Cork, interrogating the factotum.

'Six week—only six week.'

'Six weeks!' shouted Mr. Thurston, fairly beside himself with anger; 'and this is your method of doing business in this country, is it? I'll expose it, sir; I'll expose it in the House:' and, to relieve himself, he arose and began to walk swiftly up and down the compound.

It was a close morning, and the exertion soon told upon him; he felt weary and faint—he must have a bottle of soda-water and go home: there was no use making more fuss

about it—he would open his mind to Mr. Dacres, and when he got to England wouldn't he expose the system!

Acting on this resolution, he returned to the shop and asked for a bottle of soda-water.

Mr. Cork, who was really exceedingly vexed and anxious to make what amends lay in his power, went immediately to get a bottle nicely iced.

'You had better have a little brandy with it, sir; cold soda-water on the stomach at this hour in the morning is not at all the thing; allow me to fetch you a little brandy. I am exceedingly annoyed about this mistake, but I will send a man off by the next train, who will be sure to overtake the cart in which your boxes are. I dare say they will be back here in a week.'

Mr. Thurston allowed himself to be calmed with these assurances, and silently acquiesced in the proposal to have a little, just half a glass of brandy at the bottom of the tumbler. The draught was very refreshing—very refreshing indeed, and Mr. Thurston walked away in a more complacent frame of mind than half an hour before he would have thought it possible to attain for at least a week.

I am sorry to say, however, his indigna-

tion against Messrs. Cork, Screw, and Co. broke out afresh when he reached his temporary home, for the first thing that greeted him was a note, pushed into his face by a bearish-looking chuprassie: he opened it—it was a bill for two rupees, for the soda-water and nip of brandy. He crushed the paper between his fingers, threw it in the chuprassie's face, and strode angrily inside.

Mr. Thurston was beginning to make the discovery, that out of 'the trifles that make the sum of human things,' there were several to be met with in India that seriously interfered with the character of the country as a desirable residence for any man not endowed by nature with a temper that nothing can ruffle.

It may readily be imagined that Mr. Thurston was in no very amiable frame of mind all that morning. He was just in the mood into which we are all of us apt at times to fall, when we think the worst of everything, when the little foibles of our neighbour are exaggerated into grievous faults, and every petty symptom of the faults or follies of human nature which we all share alike, becomes magnified in our mind's eye into a huge depravity. And it was in this frame of mind that that he pro-

ceeded to keep his engagement with Mr Harley at that gentleman's office.

I detest long descriptions of dry details in the middle of a story, especially when they are unnecessary. I shall, therefore, not waste my reader's time and my own by describing minutely the outside and the inside of the magistrate's kutchery (*Anglicè*, court). Islamabad was one of our old stations, and the kutchery was what all kutcheries are in old stations, a large, rambling, and tolerably commodious range of buildings in the middle of a court-yard, surrounded by a low mud brick wall: this on one side separated the bare compound from a well-watered garden, in the midst of which again stood the collector and magistrate's residence.

Mr. Thurston threaded his way through a crowd of chuprassies and hangers-on, witnesses, litigants, speculators, and idlers, that thronged the entrance-room: here and there some petty court official recognised him as the sahib who was staying with the commissioner, and gave him a salaam; but the greater part of them took no notice whatever of the member of parliament as he made his way through the crowd into the inner room. Mr. Harley was then engaged in his capacity of magistrate in 'getting up' a murder case, which

was to be tried before the sessions judge. There was a degree of repose about the whole scene truly oriental. The room was kept tolerably cool by means of a well-watered tatty or screen of khuskhus grass that, when wetted and acted on by the dry hot wind, imparted a delicious coolness to the air, and emitted, at the same time, a fragrant scent; but the atmosphere was, in spite of it, not refreshing: the atmosphere in courts of law, either in our own country or in this, seldom is. A large number of human beings crowded together in a small and confined space, sweltering and perspiring, is not calculated to give freshness or fragrance to the air. The only individuals in the room who were standing, were the prisoners, a man and woman, who confronted the court, from which they were separated by a bar of wood, watched by a couple of policemen with drawn swords, who were squatting on their haunches behind them. The officials were all seated on their haunches, so were the witnesses, while Mr. Harley himself leaned back on his arm-chair and supported his heels on the table. An 'agdan'—that is to say, a stand for fire—was on the table, and in it was a red-hot 'gool,' or ball of charcoal, much used by Anglo-Indians for lighting their cheroots. The trial was

proceeding all in proper course, a witness was being examined and his evidence duly recorded, while Mr. Harley listened, suggesting now and then a question. On Mr. Thurston's being announced, he arose and welcomed him: at a sign, a chuprassie brought a chair, and the two white-faced Anglo-Saxons seated themselves in the temple of justice.

The slight interruption occasioned by the visitor's entrance soon passed off; at another sign from the magistrate, the examination of the witness recommenced. Mr. Thurston took out his pocket-book and his pencil, gazed around him, and scanned the curious scene and the strange faces with a look in which interest and sympathy were strangely mingled with pity and indignation, and prepared himself to ask questions and take notes.

'This is a murder case,' said Mr. Harley, in reply to a question addressed him by his visitor; 'there are the prisoners you see there; the man is a shopkeeper in the bazaar, and the woman is his wife: a neighbour's child was missing, a girl of fourteen—suspicion aroused by a dog that would keep scratching on the floor in prisoner's house: at last a neighbour sees the earth scratched away sufficiently to disclose something, looks at a distance like a toe,—police go and look—sure

enough it is a toe, sticking out of the ground—the floor is dug up, and the body of the missing child found buried—she had been strangled for her ornaments, a very common crime.'

'Very common, do you say? I thought the Hindoos had an aversion to destroying life.'

'Not when gain is to be got, and the life to be sacrificed is that of a human being, and not a cow.'

'Is the evidence good?'

'Very, so far as I've been with the case.'

'From you it goes to the higher court, I presume?'

'Yes, to the sessions judge.'

'And will he convict?'

'Can't help himself; he must.'

'Then, I suppose, it is a hanging matter?'

'Not at all, my dear sir. The sudder will reverse the decision. Old Joe, as we call him, the senior judge, reverses all Thompson's decisions, on principle, right or wrong: curious link in the chain of that fellow's destiny, isn't it—his life saved because Thompson wouldn't marry old Joe's daughter when he wanted him to?'

Mr. Thurston was silent. After a pause he asked,

‘Pray who is that grey-bearded old fellow squatting so sedately down there?’

‘Oh, that is the serishtadar, a native executioner,’ said Harley, adding the last explanatory clause, as the idea struck him, by an after-thought, ‘derived,’ continued the voluble magistrate, ‘from two Persian words, “ser-ishta,” a rope, and “dar,” root of the verb “dariden,” to pull.’

‘Natives are very apathetic, I am told. They do not regard death as we do.’

‘Not in the least, they take it as jolly as possible; a mild and paternal government allows them a blow-out of sweetmeats at its expense, the day before execution.’

‘Indeed! that’s the rule, is it?’

Mr. Harley nodded, and called out ‘Gool lao’ (bring the gool), using the word as he probably intended to mystify Mr. Thurston, who would naturally be familiar with the common word for fire.

An obedient chuprassie brought a small red-hot ball of charcoal on a brazen stand. Harley fumbled in his pocket for his cheroot-case; but an idea seemed to strike him, he desisted.

Harley’s ‘agdan,’ or fire-holder, was a peculiar one, rather formidable in shape. It represented a dragon in brass; the creature’s tongue protruded from its open mouth, and



bore upon its concave surface the ball of red-hot charcoal. Mr. Thurston, who had never seen such a thing before, and having the substance of the Blue-book on the Madras torture question uppermost in his mind, was predisposed to imagine everything he saw that was new, uncouth, or inexplicable, as an instrument of torture, took that view in the present instance. Harley had divined what was passing in his mind, and checked himself in his first impulse to find his cheeroot-case.

‘Curious thing this, isn’t it?’ he said, taking the brazen dragon by the tail, and turning it round so that the fire sent its heat right into Mr. Thurston’s eyes and face. ‘Many of the Hindoos, you know, worship Agni, the god of fire, so we have a little of their deity here always ready to swear them by.’

‘Ah,’ thought the member of parliament, ‘you think I cannot see through your atrocious wickedness; you would hoodwink me in this way, as if I did not know that Hindoos worship water, and not fire. I shudder to think of the real uses this fearful instrument is designed for.’ So thought Mr. Thurston; but the ideas that were passing through his mind were so legibly expressed in his eyes and other features, that Harley understood him almost as well as if he had spoken aloud.

What Mr. Thurston's position really was, the natives of course could not understand; what they believed he was, has already been hinted at. A special commissioner come out straight from the great council of Inglistan, invested with unknown and scarce-definable powers, was a sufficient object of respect and awe. Harley knew this, so he placed the fiery dragon right in front of the table, in a most conspicuous place, and called out in Hindustanee, in a threatening voice—'Now hear me, all of you present: this bara sahib, this great lord from the council of Inglistan, declares to me that the man who robbed him of his papers and money is among you; that man is certain to be hanged; no power in India can save him, not the sudder or the governor-general himself, unless you confess—who is the thief?'

Harley repeated the last question in his most solemn and impressive tone.

'Ah,' said Mr. Thurston to himself, as Harley moved the fire-holder, 'is it possible that he will make use of this horrible devilish instrument of torture before my eyes!'

Scarce had the idea crossed his mind, than, as Harley ceased speaking, at least a dozen natives, with hands folded in attitude of supplication, fell on their knees before the member

of parliament, beseeching him to do something in tones of the most touching humility.

‘Great Heaven! that I should have lived to witness such a spectacle!’ exclaimed Mr. Thurston, rising from his chair. ‘Mr. Harley, how can you, a man with human sympathies, and a human heart—how can you, an Englishman, sell your soul for filthy lucre, and for a stipend, however high, prostitute your intellect and energies to carry out such a system as this? In a British court of justice, a suppliant crowd beseech a mere stranger to save them from the tortures of the damned!’

It was too much for both the principal actors in the scene: Harley was literally almost bursting himself in his efforts to restrain his laughter, while Mr. Thurston was almost bursting with indignation. He managed, however, to restrain his feelings so far as to put his hat on his head and stalk out of the court.

After indulging in a hearty laugh, in which all the *employés* joined, though none of them for a moment guessed the cause, Harley lit a cheroot from the dragon’s mouth and went on with his case.

Mr. Thurston, when he reached England, which he did eventually, though he went through a good many adventures first, made a speech in the House, and wrote to the

‘Jupiter’ a long letter the next day, describing minutely the ‘fire-torture’ as used in the magistrates’ courts in Bengal. The subject created a great sensation in England; public meetings were held, and no end of newspaper articles written about it, and the excitement only subsided on the appearance of an announcement that the female hippopotamus at the Zoological Gardens had given birth to a male calf with two heads. From that moment the ‘fire-torture’ became a dead letter, and the subject has never been revived since.

## CHAPTER XIII.

AFTER an exciting and fatiguing day not feeling inclined to go to mess, Graham had solaced himself with an early dinner at home, and went early to bed. How long he had been asleep he knew not, but he started up out of a sound nap with the consciousness that there was some one stirring in the room. In those days of perpetual excitement and more or less alarm, people got into a marvellous habit of watchfulness. The constant and prevailing rumours that something was going to happen, no one knew exactly what, affected people in such a way that no one went to bed at night without a feeling of uncertainty as to what might not occur before the morning. Officers slept with loaded pistols under their pillows, and indeed for months, even a year and more after the mutiny, it was a common thing to see a loaded pistol in a lady's drawing-room; nay, the furniture of a house would have been considered incomplete without it.

Graham's nerves had been a little worked

upon by what he had seen and heard, and a much slighter movement in his room than would under ordinary circumstances have been noticed awoke him, and he started up in bed.

The room was dark, but he was just able to discern a figure standing by his bedside. His first impulse was to thrust his hand under his pillow for his revolver. The movement was arrested by the voice of the intruder, whose tones were familiar to him, though he spoke almost in a whisper.

‘Sahib.’

‘Well, who are you?—what d’you want?’

‘I am Imdad Ali—is the sahib sleeping?’

‘No; what is it?’ said Graham, rubbing his eyes. ‘What in the world are you come for at this time of night, Imdad Ali?—anyone ill?’

‘No, sahib; but I have come to tell you something I have heard accidentally.’

‘Ah! what is it?’

‘I was standing outside my hut just now in the shade, and no one could see I was there—two or three men passed by, and from a few words I overheard them say, I think they are going to set fire to some sahib’s house to-night.’

‘The deuce they are!’ said Graham, jumping out of bed and beginning to put on his clothes. ‘Let’s hear all about it.’

‘Hush,’ said the other; ‘speak softly—there are servants sleeping in the verandah, and if it was known that I came here at night to give you information, my life would be sacrificed. I have nothing more to say. I do not know whose house it is that is threatened: all I know is what I have said.’

‘Have you no suspicion—did nothing they said give any hint or sign as to the house?’

‘No, nothing—yet stay, I do recollect one thing: I heard one of them after they had passed me say something about a young lady, for the other burst out laughing, and made a remark about some one’s going away to the hills.’

‘That looks as if—well, are you quite sure you heard no more?’

‘Quite, and now may I go?’

‘Yes, you had better be off, for I am going to order my horse to be got ready, and when the servants are stirring you may be seen. Here, you can go out this way: you will meet no one through the garden; the wall at the bottom separates it from the lines: get over that, and you are all right.’

Graham, who had been dressing all the time this conversation had been going on, had completed the operation, and as soon as he had allowed a little time for Imdad Ali to

get clear off into the garden, he called out and ordered his horse. 'Late as it is, I'll go in case of accidents,' he said: 'the only people that are going to the hills that I know of are the Stevenses, and God forbid they should be burnt out!'

He mounted and rode off but slowly, for now it occurred to him, 'What if the whole thing was moonshine, one of the thousand-and-one groundless rumours that were about everywhere? What more likely than that two men should be talking about burning a house?—why, they were always talking about something of the kind. In many cantonments fires had taken place, but there had been none at Islamabad. Besides, he was not on very good terms with the Stevenses; at least, he had not been near them for a long while, and did not intend to go. If the whole thing was a groundless story, how foolish he would look! it would seem as if he had entertained the idea for the sake of making an excuse out of it to go to the house.' Full of these thoughts, he once or twice resolved to turn back, but somehow each time his resolution was overruled. 'If it should turn out a true bill,' he thought, 'and I had the warning and did not give it, how bitterly should I reproach myself ever after! Better run the



risk of being thought an alarmist, or snubbed for presuming on my intimacy, than take the chance of the thing being true with the warning neglected.'

Though his horse only took him at a walk, he found himself at last at Stevens's door.

'Tell the sahib I want to speak to him,' he said to a sleepy servant in the verandah.

There were lights in the drawing-room, and the sounds of music and ladies' gentle voices came from it. Graham sat on his horse and ground his teeth. Presently Stevens came out, holding his hand above his eyes to distinguish in the darkness who it was.

'Hallo! is it you, Graham?'

'Yes, I have something to say to you. I won't detain you a minute, but I couldn't feel easy without saying it, though I dare say you will think I have needlessly troubled you and myself too.'

'What's up—anything? Come, get off and come inside.'

'Thank you, I'd rather not.'

'Nonsense! you must; come in and say good-bye to the ladies; they're off to the hills tomorrow or next day.' Suiting the action to the word, Stevens caught hold of Graham's arm and half dragged him off his horse. Thus importuned, Graham yielded.

‘I’ve just been warned,’ he said, as they entered the house together, ‘that there is a plot to fire some one’s house to-night, and from what little I could gather from my informant I have come to the conclusion that it was yours that was hinted at. I thought I had better warn you so far: of course it may be all humbug, but in these days it is just as well to be on the look-out.’

The lights in the drawing-room dazzled him, having just come from the outside. There were several people in the room; most of them stopped talking as they entered and looked to see who it was.

Graham’s eyes quickly singled out one among the group. She was standing by the piano with her face towards the door, and had apparently just risen from the instrument. Burleigh was close beside her, holding a music-book in his hand. There was a small crowd of red-jackets round her, whose wearers could not, I suspect, have produced a whole heart among them. Miss Leslie was the belle of ‘our station;’ and not only that, but she had no rivals. Her empire was an undivided one; and more than volumes could say in her praise, is the fact that her head was never turned or the natural and unaffected grace of her manners spoilt by all the attention

she received. Graham was making the best of his way towards her, encouraged by the glance of recognition she gave him as he entered, but his progress was stopped. The word 'plot,' significant and ill of omen, though spoken in a whisper, had fallen like a shell into the midst of that gay assembly. He and Stevens were surrounded, and asked by at least half-a-dozen different people at once 'what was up?'

'Nothing very serious,' he said, fairly alarmed at the secret, as he intended to keep it, having got wind so speedily; 'it may be only a false alarm—at least I hope so.'

Before any reply could be given, there was a terrible commotion. A shriek from a lady who was standing by the window startled them all. As they turned towards the spot, two or three voices called out, 'Look!' Everyone looked at his neighbour; faces grew pale, lips white; there was an undefined murmuring of voices outside, a rushing noise, then came cries of 'Fire!' and the next instant a dazzling flash of light illumined half the garden, glaring through the windows and the open door, and making the lamps burn dull. Hissing, roaring, and crackling, the flames made easy way through the dry sunburnt thatch and the still drier bamboo framework

of the roof. The inmates of the house were running about like ants in a disturbed nest. Some lost their presence of mind altogether, but the prevailing impression seemed to carry them all outside. Here, leaving the ladies at a safe distance in the garden, the gentlemen turned back to render what assistance they could. Meantime the bugles and drums had added to the general din by sounding the alarm, while everyone shouted for water as if all the engines of the London Brigade could have got that raging fire under. At the first instant of alarm, Mrs. Stevens had hurried to the room where her children were sleeping, followed by her sister. Stevens saw them safe outside, and then returned to try what he could do towards rescuing a little of his property. The house was full of natives in all stages of undress, some running wildly about doing nothing, others tearing down the pictures from the walls, and the window-curtains; lifting up tables, chairs, sofas, books, ornaments, and carrying them all outside: but the savage features of the natives, even of those that were assisting, wrought up to the highest pitch of excitement and frenzy by intoxicating drugs, bore one expression above all others, that of triumphant exultation. Foremost among the group outside

stood Mrs. Stevens, watching, with tearless eyes and aching heart, the destruction of her happy home. Her youngest child was in her arms, while Georgy, a little fair-haired boy between three and four years old, stood by her in his little night-shirt, and with his bare feet on the gravel, clinging in terror to his mother's dress.

The thatch of the bungalow had been fired simultaneously in four places; a gentle breeze was blowing at the time, but the heat caused by the increasing flame soon changed the quiet breeze into a strong wind that fanned the fire and added momentarily to its intensity and force. As it swept over the dry thatch and among the rafters, large pieces of burning wood and straw fell continuously in the interior of the house, igniting the carpets on the floors and any combustible material they came in contact with, and so hastened the work of destruction. The glare of the fire lit up the surrounding scene for a long distance, and shone with dazzling brightness on the faces and figures of those standing in the garden. A great deal of the furniture had been brought out by the efforts of the officers who happened to be in the house at the time, and others who had hurried to the spot at the first alarm to render what assistance they

could: the servants, too, appeared zealous, but many were helping themselves to various little articles of value which they found lying about, and which they were able to secrete in the confusion without fear of detection.

Graham was indefatigable in his exertions for the unfortunate family. At imminent risk of his life, he had been the last who dared enter the flaming house, and brought away anything he could lay his hand upon. He had just returned from what he thought must be his last effort, with his arm full of books and little knickknacks from the drawing-room table and mantelpiece, which he deposited on the grass plot, and stood for an instant to gain breath and wipe away the perspiration that streamed down his forehead and cheeks. At that instant he caught sight of Mrs. Stevens, standing with her little boy by her side.-

‘Poor little fellow, where are his clothes and shoes?’

‘Where are you going, Graham?’ shouted Stevens at the top of his voice, as he saw him make a dart at the house, which it was now most dangerous to enter. ‘Here, Burleigh, see the ladies into the carriage, will you?—it is just brought out into the road: take care, I dare say the horses will be frightened—I must

look after this boy, he will be killed to a certainty.'

Graham, however, was more fortunate. He rushed through the entrance-room, turned to the right in the direction, as he knew, of the bedrooms; he leapt over the burning masses that lay strewed in all directions upon the floor, and gained the inner room: here the beds were standing, the children's little cots alongside of their parents'; the little shoes of the eldest boy with some of his clothes were on a chair by the bed; he had just time to snatch them up, when a piece of burning thatch fell upon the sheets and ignited them in a moment. The passage by which he had entered was no longer available; his egress was barred by a quantity of bamboos that had just fallen in, flaming like everything else; he turned and dashed through an opposite door; here he found himself in a smaller bedroom so full of smoke, that he could scarcely see to the opposite side of the chamber. There was no time to pause, every instant his danger increased, and escape became more difficult; on, on he went through the smoke, and forced his way into a smaller room, beyond which at a glance he knew must be the sanctum, the place dedicated to the toilet of the girl he loved. Most of the articles of

furniture, and the necessary apparatus of a young lady's dressing-table, had been carried off, and all that remained was a large mirror and a little book lying beside it; he snatched up the latter as he passed, and finding a window half open, and half closed by venetians, he dashed them open, and without acting on the whole adage of 'Look before you leap,' sprung through the aperture, and landed safely in the garden at the rear of the house. He hastened round to the front, and almost ran into Stevens's arms, who was anxiously looking for him.

'Here, I have got them,' he said, thrusting the child's clothes into the father's hand, who took them with thanks and hurried after the carriage.

'This I will keep, and give it to her myself to-morrow,' he added to himself as he put the little book into his coat-pocket.

Mrs. Stevens and her sister and the children were very shortly after housed in Captain Murray's bungalow, where they were very glad to feel that they were safe. Nothing more remained to be done, but to collect the scattered property into one spot in the garden, and put a guard over it. This work over, the whole party separated, leaving the ruined bungalow to smoke and burn itself out.



## CHAPTER XIV.

EARLY next morning, Graham, who had fallen into a sound sleep after his exertions, was aroused by a note being brought to him from the adjutant of his regiment. This contained a summons to attend at the brigadier's quarters at 7 A.M.

When he arrived, he was ushered into the presence of the brigadier, Captain Barncliffe, and Ramchurn.

'It has been reported to me, Mr. Graham,' began the brigadier, 'that you had received notice, last night, that an attempt was about to be made on Captain Stevens's bungalow: is that the case?'

'Not exactly, sir. I certainly did receive a warning that some house was to be fired. I guessed it was Stevens's by a slight clue accidentally afforded. The event proved I guessed right.'

'And are you not aware, sir,' replied the brigadier, drawing himself up in his chair, his rotund form swelling with importance,

'that you have committed a serious military offence? In a matter so nearly concerning the state of the garrison I command, it was your duty, sir, to have reported the matter through the usual channel for my information.'

'You mean, I suppose,' said Graham, scarcely able to restrain a smile, 'that I should have sent a letter to the adjutant to go through the commanding officer to the brigade-major?'

'Undoubtedly, sir; your proper course was to address the adjutant of your regiment. An officer of your standing could not have been ignorant of his duty in this respect.'

'Well, sir, all I can say is, I should act on another occasion just as I did last night. I had only just time to warn Captain Stevens as it was. Had I waited to write, the warning would have been useless.'

'Useless or not, sir, it was your duty to do so. Are the rules of the service to be infringed every day by every boy who thinks himself qualified to judge when they may be set aside? As you choose to justify your course of action instead of apologising for such an unmilitary act, I shall report the matter to the commander-in-chief. In the meantime, Captain Barncliffe, you will be good enough to com-

municate with Colonel Wetherall, and desire him to place this young man under arrest.'

Captain Barncliffe, who had been sitting quite quietly all the time the conference was going on, apparently listening with a deferential air to the folly his chief was giving utterance to, smiling blandly every now and then at Graham, raised his eyebrows a little with astonishment at the order given him, but recovering his former composure the instant after, merely inclined his head and said,

'Yes sir.'

'Indeed, the natives tell me,' continued the brigadier, glancing at Ramchurn as much as to say, 'There is my source of information, that the medium by which you derived that information is a very questionable one.'

'Then the natives are—liars,' said Graham, now thoroughly enraged.

'This before me, sir! Leave the room!'

Graham turned and left, his cheek crimson with passion.

'They talk about the sepoys of the Bengal army being mutinous: in my opinion, it is the officers who are mutinous, not the men,' said the brigadier, working himself into a passion. 'I'll bring that young man to a court martial as sure as my name's Cartwright. Make the necessary report, Captain Barncliffe, and draw out a statement to for-

ward to his excellency—Gross insubordination and disrespect, and neglect of duty in not reporting the conspiracy and intent to commit incendiarism. I need not detain you any more. Good morning, Captain Barncliffe;’ and Captain Barncliffe went.

The order for putting Graham under arrest reached Colonel Wetherall in due form that morning, about half-past eight. He was astonished, as well he might be, but annoyance at the transaction overcame every other feeling. He immediately ordered his buggy and drove to Graham’s quarters. He arrived before the adjutant, through whom, as a matter of form, the order from the commanding officer had been transmitted.

He had hardly time to utter a word of condolence before the adjutant came in.

‘Here, colonel, is a circular marked “Immediate,”’ he said, on entering; ‘the brigadier’s orderly brought it. I found you were not at home; so knowing you had come here, I took it and brought it on.’

The colonel took the circular and read—‘Commanding officers of corps and detachments are directed to assemble immediately at the brigadier’s quarters. Please write, “Seen.”’

‘Well, I must be off, then,’ said the colonel,

signing his initials on the envelope of the circular, and giving it to a servant. 'The others have seen the order, so I shall be behind-hand. I'll speak to the brigadier about you, Graham, and get this nonsense put a stop to. Good morning.'

As Colonel Wetherall drove into the brigadier's compound, he found Captain Hornby had arrived before him, and was walking up and down in front of the house in the shade, looking anxious.

Mr. Dacres's buggy drew up close behind the colonel's. Harley was with him.

'What news, Dacres?' said Colonel Wetherall, seeing by the expression on that gentleman's face that some affair of more than usual import had brought them together.

'A row up country, that is all,' replied the other. There was a sepoy standing sentry close by. 'Come along inside; I'll tell you all about it.'

Mr. Dacres hurriedly led the way in, followed by the rest.

'May I beg you will desire that native to leave the room,' said he, after shaking hands with the brigadier.

'Who? Ramchurn? Oh, he does not understand a word of English. I assure you he has been my servant for thirty years. How-

ever, if you wish it,' added Ramchurn's master, seeing a look of determination on Dacres's face, 'I will certainly do so. Ramchurn, you may go and smoke your hooka.'

The sleek Hindoo made an obeisance and departed, not, however, to smoke a pipe till he had sent off a messenger to the lines, saying, 'that the commissioner and all the commanding officers had met at the brigadier's house, on some very important business indeed, and that all were to be on their guard.'

'I have some intelligence of a very grave nature to communicate to you, gentlemen: some of it you may have heard before.' They all nodded assent except the colonel. 'I have just received a telegram, saying that the native troops at Meerut have risen, destroyed the station, and slaughtered the whole European population. The mutineers then marched to Delhi. The native troops there joined them and the population of the city. All the Europeans have been killed, and the King of Delhi seated on the throne!'

This was indeed a communication of grave import. How many can recall the feelings with which they listened to the astounding intelligence for the first time!

The brigadier, though the announcement was not new to him, was the one most visibly

affected. He fidgetted about in his chair; looked round for Ramchurn, and not seeing him, got up and began to pace nervously up and down the room.

‘Meerut!’ said Colonel Wetherall, who had not heard the report before, and was thunder-struck; ‘why, they have the 60th Rifles and Carabiniers there.’

‘And artillery,’ added Hornby. ‘I heard of this before; the report has got about somehow in the bazaars and lines. I can only repeat here what I said to the natives, that I don’t believe a word of it.’

‘Nor I,’ said the colonel; ‘it is incredible, absolutely incredible.’

‘It is true, though, all the same,’ said Dacres. ‘Of course, it is exaggerated.’

‘Where did the telegram come from?’

‘From Allyghur.’

‘Then, depend on it, the story has picked up a good deal on its way before it reached the telegraph-office at Allyghur.’

‘Very likely; still I do not doubt that in the main it is correct. The fact of its being so universally credited is something in its favour.’

‘Not much,’ said Harley: ‘reports of this sort have been about constantly lately, though I confess there is too much reason to believe

this to be true to a certain extent; yet if it were to turn out false, I should not be very much surprised.'

'What could the Carabiniers have been about?' again urged Colonel Wetherall. 'Why, had they followed them up with a troop of the Carabiniers and a couple of guns, even supposing they had got clear off after mutinying and setting fire to their lines—it is not likely they did anything worse—still they might have annihilated them surely before they got to Delhi. That part of the story, therefore, about the rising at Delhi, it seems impossible to believe. And if that is false, probably the whole is.'

'Besides, they have an artillery officer in command at Meerut,' said Hornby; 'nothing will induce me to believe that he could allow a few sepoys to sack a station and get off scot free—it can't be true.'

'Nevertheless, strange as it may seem, I tell you it is substantially correct,' replied Dacres. 'Do not deceive yourselves, this is but the beginning—no, I am wrong there—the beginning was at Barrackpore the other day, when they turned those mutineers out in such a ridiculous way, as if with the avowed object of spreading disaffection over the whole country. That was the beginning,



this is the continuation—we are not out of the wood yet, depend on it.'

Hornby muttered something about 'an alarmist,' and 'a timid old gentleman,' which Dacres did not, however, condescend to notice, but turned to the brigadier, and asked him if there was any particular course of action he intended to pursue in which the civil authorities could aid and co-operate.

Before any answer could be given, a buggy drove up to the door, and in rushed Murray.

'Have you heard the news?' he called out in his stentorian voice; 'never heard such a thing in my life—can't be true—all the sepoys!—'

'Hush,' said Dacres; 'better not talk too loud—the natives——'

'The natives! pshaw! they know all about it—so much for your telegraphs and telegrams—they got the news just as soon as you did.'

'Perhaps they were expecting it,' said Barncliffe, speaking for the first time.

'Just as soon,' continued Murray, still bawling as if he wished to make everyone within a mile of the house hear him. 'Inayut Ally, one of my native officers, came running breathless up from the lines to tell me.'

'What did he say?' asked two or three voices at once.

‘He said that all the native army had mutinied, murdered every European, woman and child, in every station in India, except Islamabad, and that the King of Delhi was ‘badshah now!’

The effect of the announcement, which appeared to carry more weight with it than Mr. Dacres’s, though pretty much to the same tenor, varied according to the difference in the character of each of the hearers. The brigadier’s hasty shambling walk became a sort of uncomfortable amble, at which pace he went up and down, and then round and round the room, muttering all the time, ‘It isn’t true, it can’t be true, I won’t believe it,’ and such-like declarations of incredulity.

Captain Hornby, who had come in uniform, sat with his sword between his legs playing with his sword-knot, and began to whistle. Dacres had an arm resting on the table, leaning his head against his clenched hand, while with the other he drummed the devil’s tattoo upon the sissoo wood. Harley exhibited no outward signs of emotion at all, but nursed his left leg on his right, and watched with apparent amusement and some contempt the brigadier. Colonel Wetherall walked leisurely up to the window and looked out, with his back to the company. Captain Barncliffe got

very white in the face, and began mechanically turning over the pages of a 'Torrens,' while Murray balanced himself on the arm of a chair, and looked first at one and then at another, and, like Hornby, began to whistle. The awkward silence was broken at length by the brigadier, who, unable to bear the separation any longer, ejaculated—

'Ramchurn!'

Now Ramchurn had gone to smoke as bidden; but after the first whiff, it occurred to him he might just as well, now that the coast was clear, return to the outside of the door, as he was not allowed in, and listen to what the sahibs were talking about. He had seen Murray come in, and was in time to overhear all that officer had said.

Obedient to his master's voice, he pushed open the door and thrust his head inside.

'Take your ugly mug out of this, you black devil!' shouted Murray with a threatening movement towards the object of his aversion.

The brigadier stopped, stared at the Irregular Cavalry officer a moment or two, and then continued his shuffling gait in silence. Dacres was the next to speak. Repeating his former words, he said—

'Have you any particular course of action to recommend, brigadier? The intelligence is

no doubt but too true in the main: I shall be happy to render any assistance in my power towards carrying out your views; and as all the senior officers are present, it would be well to discuss any plan or suggestion for our common safety.'

'Yes,' said the brigadier after a short reflection; 'I have decided on the first step.' 'Colonel Wetherall,' he added, addressing that officer, 'will you be good enough to assemble a regimental committee to inspect and report upon the quarter-guard and the magazine? As soon as the duplicate reports have been sent into the brigade-office, I will direct a station committee to assemble. The attention of the committee should be drawn especially to the question, whether these buildings are fire-proof or not.'

Colonel Wetherall indicated assent, smiling as he did so. Harley thrust the head of his riding-cane he had in his hand right into his mouth, and by extending his cheek from the inside to the fullest extent practicable, kept himself from laughing. Barncliffe, with that peculiar expression which you knew not whether to interpret as a sign he was inwardly amused or not, made a pencil note of the order in the book in which he was accustomed to make entries of the kind.

‘And I think, gentlemen,’ continued the brigadier, ‘I may as well take this opportunity of remarking, that considering the unsettled state of public affairs, it would be as well if you would send in the half-yearly and quarterly returns that are usually sent in on the 1st May. You have received none as yet, have you, Captain Barncliffe?’

‘Very few, sir.’

‘Bad habit—it’s a bad habit gentlemen allowing these things to get into arrears: pray stir up your quartermaster, colonel, about it.’

Dacres, scarce able to control himself, rose to go. ‘Would it not be as well to have a picket of irregular cavalry to patrol the station at night, and another over the guns to protect them?’ he asked as he turned towards the door.

‘Why irregular cavalry?’ asked Colonel Wetherall, turning sharply on him; ‘why not infantry, sir?’

‘What the deuce do you want a picket to protect the guns for?’ asked Captain Hornby, at the same moment and with some asperity.

‘I’ll back my men to put down mutiny in a corps of English dragoons,’ said Murray.

‘I have been with my regiment for thirty

years,' said the colonel, 'and I think I ought to know them.'

'The officers at Delhi and Meerut were shot by their own men,' said Harley.

This remark fell like a wet blanket on the party: they were silent and mused for a moment.

'We ought to show confidence in our men,' said the colonel.

'Decidedly, you are quite right, Colonel Wetherall—nothing like showing confidence,' said the brigadier: 'suppose we have a patrol of cavalry and a picket of infantry over the guns?'

'I don't want pickets sent down to my lines to inoculate my men with disaffection,' said Captain Hornby.

'I cannot allow you, Hornby, to throw discredit on my regiment in that way: why should an infantry picket inoculate your men with disaffection?'

'Has not the mutiny been confined to the infantry and cavalry?' retorted the artillery officer.

'No Irregulars in it,' shouted Murray.

'The Meerut and Delhi regiments were badly disciplined,' said the colonel; 'my men are staunch, I will stake my existence on it.'

‘We all do that pretty much,’ remarked Barncliffe.

‘My men will never leave their guns,’ said Hornby.

‘Nor mine their colours,’ said the colonel.

‘Nor mine their standards,’ said Murray.

Harley was vastly amused. ‘Better let each corps patrol its own lines,’ he said with a sneer.

‘Quite so,’ said the brigadier: ‘an excellent suggestion, Mr. Harley; we military men are not above taking advice from civilians. Colonel Wetherall, will you have a patrol and picket of your own men? And you, Captain Murray, can do the same with yours.’

‘Better go on as if nothing had happened,’ said Barncliffe.

‘Yes, after all, I think that would be the best plan,’ said the brigadier: ‘we’ll go on just as if nothing had happened, and let this excitement blow over. There is a good deal of excitement in the lines, is there not?’

‘None in mine,’ said Colonel Wetherall, indignantly.

‘Nor mine,’ said Murray.

Hornby would not deign to answer.

No one having any further suggestion to offer, there ensued here rather an awkward

silence. It was not of long duration, for Dacres signed to Harley to go, and accordingly they rose and left, the others following their example. And so the council of war broke up, and the brigadier was left alone again with Ramchurn.



## CHAPTER XV.

THE next morning the usual party assembled at the mess of the 75th to 'chota hazrie,' which is a meal, I must observe, for the information of the uninitiated, taken at any time from 6 to 8 A.M., consisting, where gentlemen alone are present, of tea and coffee, bread, butter, toast, brandy and soda-water, any or all of these promiscuously (and the same when ladies partake of it, except the last two ingredients). Most of the officers of the 75th, and generally two or three of the other residents, met here every morning to discuss this indispensable morning meal, and their neighbours' affairs at the same time, for it is allowed on all hands that scandal forms the staple subject of conversation at these times. On the morning in question, however, they had something more important to talk about, and, accordingly, took up the subject of the mutiny at the point where it had been dropped when the party at the mess-table broke up the night before, and went on with it, much to the edification of

two Mahometan servants who stood behind the group of officers, one on each side, with arms folded, and an expression in their faces of the utmost apathy and unconcern. When my readers are informed that these men understood almost every word that was said, they will be able to judge how much they must have been edified by the conversation carried on very much in the following style:—

‘Any news, Hornby?’ asked one or two voices at once, as that officer rode up to the verandah and dismounted.

‘No; I’ve just been to the post-office, and there’s no up-country post in.’

‘Deuced rum,’ said one.

‘Devilish odd,’ said another.

‘Who’d have thought it?’ moralised Dickenson, the adjutant; ‘these sepoys that we slave away our lives for, that we’ve done everything in the world for——’

‘Even sending them to drill,’ said young Kingsley, the youngest ensign in the corps, who, having a pardonable horror of drill, and the courage to ‘cheek’ the adjutant, went commonly by the *sobriquet* of ‘Young Cocky’ — ‘blest, if I was a Jack, if I wouldn’t do as they’ve done.’

‘The devil you would, Cocky! wait till you

have to pass your drill, and then see,' retorted Dickenson, laughing.

'By all accounts we shall none of us live so long as that,' said another young fellow named Milford, the senior ensign.

'Don't be profane,' said Cocky, with mock solemnity. 'Don't you see, here's Cursing Blunt coming to keep you in order.'

'Ax,' was the laconic reply of his brother-ensign.

At this moment Graham came up, along with another officer of the regiment named Cochrane. Blunt was a little behind.

'Hallo, Graham,' said two or three, speaking together. 'How is it you're here? We thought you were under arrest.'

'Well, you see I'm not. Murray managed it right well. The colonel, he went to the old brig, and talked and talked; but it was of no use, he was as obstinate as a pig. Then Stevens tried—no go; at last Murray got hold of Ramchurn, gave him four rupees and a little palaver, letting him know what 'twas for, and, would you believe it, sir? before an hour the colonel got a letter through the brigade-office, telling him to release me from arrest, pending a report to the general.'

'That wasn't a bad dodge, by Jove. Next time I want leave, I'll have a go at Ramchurn.'

‘Nice business it will be if we have a row here, with this old fool in command!—why, we shall be up a tree in no time,’ said Cochran.

‘Gone coons,’ laconically observed Sody.

‘Don’t talk such rot, man: row, why should we have a row here?’ said Hornby. ‘Men can’t mutiny when there are guns to watch them.’

‘Besides, why should our men mutiny?’ said Sody. ‘They’re the quietest set of fellows in the world.’

‘Don’t be too sure,’ said Graham. ‘My old father, who served for thirty years with sepoy, has often said to me, “Depend on it, if ever the sepoy find out their power, they’ll use it.”’

‘Well, perhaps they might,’ said another; ‘but I’ll never believe they would assassinate their officers. They might take the country from us, and all that, but I would trust them with my life and honour to the last.’

‘Would you?’ said Blunt, a grey-haired man, somewhat red in the face, the senior captain with the corps. ‘I knew cursed well, these cursed sepoy would cut our throats some day—cursed black brutes.’

‘I almost wonder you stayed so long in the service, if them’s your sentiments,’ said Kingsley.

'Shows what you youngsters know about it,' growled Blunt, for the first time for a very long period having given utterance to a whole sentence without any of what Robert Hall calls the devil's peppercorn rent.

'Well, all I can say is, if the Jacks liked—mind you, I don't think they do want to—but if they liked, they could turn us out of the country in no time,' said Sody.

'What rot!' said another; 'couldn't we pit Hindoo against Mussulman, if they did choose to break out, as they say they've done, and make them cut one another's throats?' The two servants might have been seen, if anyone had been watching them, to glance at one another, and move a pace nearer the speakers on each side so as to hear better. Their motions, as their presence, were utterly disregarded, however.

'No need for that,' said Egerton, an artillery officer in Hornby's battery. 'We'll have plenty of Europeans up here soon, and then we can make these damned brutes shut their mouths. I'd give the Hindoos a dish of roast beef all round, and the Mussulmen a ham a piece, and wash it down with pig's blood.'

This idea was greeted with a shout of laughter. The two servants looked at one another again..

‘What the deuce are these new cartridges they make such a fuss about?’ said Cochrane. ‘I’ve never seen one.’

‘Well, I have,’ said Dickenson. ‘The colonel has a few sent up by post. I saw them yesterday.’

‘Well, are they greased or not?’

‘Greased—yes, of course they are, with pig’s fat, too, for all I know—that is, the paper they’re made of.’

‘Then all I can say is, it is a damned shame the government making us take an oath to the men that the cartridges are not greased, when they are.’

‘Mind you, I did not say they were to be issued, or had been; only the ones the colonel has are decidedly greased.’

‘Then, if they are not going to issue them, why have they introduced the new platoon exercise?’ said Cochrane. Dickenson shrugged his shoulders.

‘It looks deuced like issuing them, any way; for the last hundred years the men have been biting off the end of their cartridges, and now they are taught a new platoon exercise, by which they break them off without putting them to their mouths at all; and yet they are told there is to be no change whatever. It is enough to make them mutiny.’

‘Curse their mutiny—they never do anything but mutiny. There’s that cursed pay-sergeant of mine never leaves me alone for a day, but he comes up with his cursed accounts,’ said Blunt. ‘The only way to manage the natives, is to make them all Christians—curse them.’

‘It will go precious hard with us if there is a row here,’ said Hornby. ‘I heard Dacres say myself, that if the Nawab turned against us—and he wasn’t at all sure of him—not a soul of us would be able to get out of the district.’

‘Oh, as to that matter, if they like, of course they can murder us like sheep,’ said Dickenson. ‘Why, bless me, they have only to put men with loaded muskets, or say, two men at each of our doors, sound the alarm at night, and murder us as we go out.’

‘Yes; or if they were to surround the mess-house, how easily they might do for most of us, at any rate!’

‘And the ladies and children?’

‘God help them!’ muttered Graham, who had taken but little part in the conversation.

The party soon afterwards broke up, the officers all retiring to their respective houses, for it began to get hot. The two servants, who had been much edified at this conver-

sation, took away the plates, cups and saucers, and then took themselves off to the lines, where they repeated in the ears of the already-excited sepoy every word they had heard, with such additions, amendments, and colouring as their prejudices, heightened by religious fanaticism, inclined them to.



## CHAPTER XVI.

It is not easy to describe the state of disquietude and excitement that prevailed at Islamabad, after the terrible shock occasioned by the announcement of the outbreak. One or two families of the officers quartered there, and of the non-military residents left, preferred running the risk of travelling during that time of general excitement to remaining in the station, which many began to look upon as doomed. They all reached Allahabad, or some other place of safety, after various adventures, which I cannot now pause to recount, and which are of no importance to the history. My business is only to follow out the adventures and the fate of those that remained behind.

In a very few days, letters came from stations to the south and west, with which communication had not been as yet cut off by the rebels, giving details, doubtless much exaggerated, of the disasters at Meerut and Delhi. The whole European [community of

India seemed to have been struck by a sudden blow, like a ship at sea caught in a typhoon before any arrangement had been made to meet the fury of the storm. Many, who had friends and dear relatives at distant places, opened their letters almost with trembling hands, fearful of the disclosures that might be made. It was commonly reported, and by a vast number actually believed, that Islama-bad was the only place in India where any European was left alive. Stories were invented and massacres described in the minutest detail, and accounts given of occurrences that had taken place at distant stations, from which it was utterly impossible that any could have been received. No matter; people were more eager to devour the information they got, than to examine its source.

Natives of course believed all these stories, and took pleasure in repeating them, magnifying each time they passed from one to another every occurrence that could serve to alarm those who were weak-minded enough to attend to and encourage them. Officers talked to one another of the probable behaviour of their men in the crisis which they foresaw must come sooner or later; ladies talked to their ayahs, and allowed the latter to frighten them to their heart's content with all sorts

of evil prognostications, almost with threats. Many of the domestic servants became insolent to a degree that was absolutely unbearable. Mrs. Stevens's little boy came running into their drawing-room one afternoon, saying that his bearer had told him that he would be killed, and begging his mamma to protect him. When she went out to remonstrate with the man, he was grossly insolent, and left the house muttering that in a few days he would be the master and she the servant. Mrs. Barncliffe went into her dressing-room suddenly, and found her ayah trying on one of her best dresses, and admiring her figure before the glass: the girl, when she found she was caught, excused herself by saying she thought her mistress had given her the dress, but, as she had not, she would put it back again for a day or two. The generality, however, of the servants exhibited no such insolent behaviour, but performed their work as usual. The native soldiers of all arms were particularly attentive to their duties, and more than usually respectful to their European superiors. The native officers, ever loud in their protestations of fidelity, could find no language strong enough to condemn the conduct of their fellow-countrymen at Delhi and Meerut. The brigadier had had all his fears

allayed by the arguments of the faithful Ramchurn, who very easily persuaded him to banish from his mind all distrust, if he ever had any, of his faithful domestics and the sepoys. On the whole, the way in which the English residents discussed public affairs was to be accounted for only by the most utter recklessness or indifference to the danger of their position, or that habitual confidence in their servants and subordinates which had become a second nature.

Officers openly debated in presence of servants and of their men—who, they took for granted, understood nothing of what they said—the plans for their escape, should an outbreak really occur, thus revealing what should have been kept a profound secret if it was to be of any service. What would be the fate of those who, from a sense of duty, remained with their men to the last?—what the fate of the ladies and children, exposed to imminent perils, and dangers all the more terrible because uncertain and undefined? The accounts that had been received of the outbreak at Meerut and Delhi, had come interspersed with all the horrible and heartrending details of atrocities and outrages upon human nature which were so prevalent in the earlier stages of the mutiny,

and which were not discovered to be exaggerated till months after.

As time went on, difficulties increased. Unseen though real dangers assumed a tangible form. Servants became unmanageable, impertinent, and openly dishonest. Night after night there were alarms of fire in some part of the cantonment: the residents started from their beds at the first blast of the alarm-bugle, and rushed out to see if it was their own residence or another's in flames. These fires were not by any means always so destructive as they were intended to be; precautions had been taken, water was at hand, and, strange to say, assistance readily, and to all appearance willingly, rendered by the sepoys and a portion of the servants. Every man slept with loaded pistols under his pillow, and a sword by his bed-side. Even ladies learnt the use of firearms, and kept revolvers on the drawing-room table, or near at hand. The weather, too, was, as it always is at that time of the year, intensely hot, and fathers and mothers thought sorrowfully of what must be the fate of their little ones should they be driven from the shelter of their homes and forced to undergo the exposure of a long journey on foot under the scorching rays of a May sun. It was a time

of fearful anxiety—of terrible suspense, not unaptly portrayed in those awful passages of Holy Writ which describe the latter days of the world's history.

Strange was the contrast between the two heads of the civil and military departments. Brigadier Cartwright, incapable at any time, was now not only an encumbrance, but an actual source of mischief. Relying entirely on the fidelity of his factotum and confidant, Ramchurn, he imparted to that worthy all the information he received respecting events at distant places, and all the plans that were discussed, with which he was acquainted, by the residents at Islamabad for providing for their own security. Beyond this, and signing committee reports, and issuing daily brigade orders utterly useless in their tendency, he did nothing; nor could he be induced to do anything by the persuasions of his brigademajor or Colonel Wetherall, the only two officers in the place who had the least influence with him.

Mr. Dacres, on the contrary, was indefatigable in his exertions to make the most of the slender resources at his disposal. Utterly distrusting all his native subordinates, he yet kept up such an appearance of confidence that they were entirely deceived,

while he made use of their services, gladly rendered, as they fancied they served only to fasten the net more tightly round the victims. He sent messengers out to neighbouring stations to gain intelligence, and more than one spy he sent to Delhi, taking care, however, to entrust them with nothing which could be of use to the enemy should they prove faithless.

The nearest place to which they could send for succour was Aurungabad. At this station there was a large civil community, and a strong fort, within whose walls the European and Christian residents would be safe. They had a whole regiment of Europeans and a troop of artillery at this place, but, as Dacres well knew, their strength, small as it was, would be crippled in the day of action by the incompetence of the commander. From this quarter, then, there was but little hope of relief. Cowards are always selfish, and if Brigadier Littlesole, commanding at Aurungabad, was not a coward, he, by all accounts, was as likely to cut off his right arm and send it to Islamabad as to spare a detachment and a gun or two from his force unless ordered, though the number capable of bearing arms among the civil residents would have been ample to hold the fort. Report said, too, that

the 159th Muffineers, the only European regiment at Aurungabad, were even then in a state of semi-mutiny, and liable to be panic-struck the first day they were led into the field, so little confidence had they in their officers.

Rather than look for assistance from that quarter, he was inclined to regard Mitterpoor, the next station, and it was the only other station in the whole province that had a European garrison, as the most likely source from whence he might receive aid. There was a major-general there, for it was the headquarters of a division, and the divisional commandant was more likely to take the responsibility of sending a force to their assistance than the officers subordinate to him, as was Brigadier Littlesole at Aurungabad; and the major-general was not only more likely to take this responsibility, but, what was of even more consequence perhaps, he was more likely to feel the responsibility he would incur by refusing the solicited aid.

It may well be supposed that the ladies, sharing with their lords as they did the danger, suffered no less from the anxieties of the time. As with the men, so with the women, the abnormal state of the moral atmosphere produced different results in acting



upon different peculiarities of character. Many of the ladies, feeling themselves so utterly dependent upon others who were in their turn helpless, or next to helpless, placed their confidence in the invincible shield of Providence, or resigned themselves faithfully and trustfully to His will. Others again, with weaker minds, but perhaps as much principle, exhibited in their conduct the strangest inconsistencies, which a moraliser, who left out of account the curious effects on the conduct which conflicting principles and passions, and the weaknesses of human nature, not unfrequently produce, might have been at a loss to account for, except in that last support of a baffled philosophy, insanity.

I have not yet introduced the reader to the interior of the colonel's house, where, in all matters of domestic detail, female genius in the bodily forms of Mrs. Wetherall and her friend Miss Trinchinopoly reigned supreme. Mrs. Wetherall was a good old soul as ever lived; not over-refined, and, at the time of life she had reached when this story commences, with few attractions, though in her younger days tradition said she had been the belle of many a ball-room, and broken the heart of many a bachelor. Her experience in married life had been pretty extensive, having

had for a first husband an indigo-planter, next a civilian, and, thirdly, the gallant colonel himself, who espoused her when Captain Wetherall. She was goodnature and kindness personified; aware that she was not possessed of many attractions of person or accomplishment, she wisely endeavoured to make up for their absence by other qualities, in the exercise of which every woman may become useful long after she has ceased to be ornamental. She did her best to keep the colonel's house for him nicely, that is, as he liked, and as became the commanding officer of a regiment of the Bengal Army: and she made a point of adding as much as she could to the comfort of all the officers of the regiment, who were not above receiving these aids from her; and if in doing this she occasionally laid herself open to the charge of interfering and of indelicacy, all I can say is, it is not in human nature to be perfect.

Of Miss Trinchinopoly, I am sorry to say I can give but a very incomplete history. Who she was, and whence she came, and what was her relation to the colonel and his wife, if any, and what her position in his household, was always a mystery. It is extremely doubtful, I think, if even the colonel himself could have answered a question upon either one of these points. It was rumoured for a

long time that she was the daughter of a Madras officer; but Dr. Mactartan, a native of Aberdeen, who was at the time I am speaking of in medical charge of the 75th N.I., very soon after joining the regiment discovered that this tradition merely rested on the slender grounds of the lady's name being Trinchinopoly, on which foundation the superstructure of the story of her deceased father having been a Madras officer solely rested. This theory being proved untenable, public opinion was utterly baffled in its attempt to fathom the depth of Miss Trinchinopoly's former history; even Dr. Mactartan was obliged to confess himself utterly non-plussed, and he often used to declare he should be quite ashamed to show his face in his native city after being defeated in his attempt to discover the past history of one out of the many individuals with whom he had been brought much in contact.

As it is not intended to make anything out of the mystery in which Miss Trinchinopoly's antecedents were involved to add interest to the plot of this history, I shall say no more on the subject, further than that at the period when this lady is first introduced to my readers she was residing, evidently as an honoured guest, in the colonel's house, in spite of Mrs. Barncliffe's hints and innuendoes that she was a paid companion of Mrs. Wether-

all, or Captain Blunt's bold assertion that she was the colonel's second wife. She was a buxom lass of the mystic age of forty; fair, and fat into the bargain; comfortable in circumstances evidently, whether she drew a monthly pension from a military or widow's fund, or an annuity from an insurance office. She was always in good spirits, had invariably an excellent appetite, and was quite capable, which a great many people are not, of fully appreciating a joke. She was not super-human however, and shared in the common weaknesses of human nature; consequently it is not to be wondered at, that the intelligence of the mutiny, and the uncomfortable aspect of affairs at Islamabad, disquieted her as it did other people. She and the colonel's wife, however, did their best to provide against any accidents. They considered it necessary to make their preparations for flight at night, when the servants could not see what they were doing, as they endeavoured to carry out the colonel's views, and keep up a show of confidence to the last. Not that Mrs. Wetherall in the least distrusted the sepoys of her husband's regiment—far from it; there was nothing to be feared from them, of that she was convinced—it was the irregular cavalry she dreaded. Miss Trinchinopoly, who kept

up her hypothetical connection with the sister presidency, dreaded all alike, and remarked that she had never felt secure ever since she had been in the Bengal presidency. Mrs. Wetherall, then, by way of being always prepared for flight, sewed up a quantity of rupees in a system of mysterious rows in a corded petticoat, placing them one against the other edgeways; in this manner she had three hundred rupees current coin of the realm always ready to carry off with her, while at the same time the silver circular bars served as crinoline, and helped to set off her figure to the best advantage: she of course could not change this garment, or leave it about, or send it to be washed, and it occasionally occurred to her as a very awkward conjunction of affairs, if the sepoy were to delay the mutiny, what arrangements she should make with regard to the washing of the article in question. Miss Trinchinopoly had a good many rather valuable jewels; these she collected, and sewed up in a kind of semicircular pincushion form, adding a little cotton wool as stuffing, and then, by the aid of two pieces of tape, she was able to wear the article tied round her waist just below the small of the back, with considerable effect upon the figure, and comparative safety as regarded the concealed valuables.

Mrs. Barncliffe adopted the more simple plan of putting all her jewels in her jewel-case, and sleeping with it under her pillow every night, keeping it as much as possible in her sight all the day. After the lapse of about a week, it occurred to her to open the case to see if the jewels were all right, when she found they had all been abstracted, and bits of gravel placed there instead.

Captain Murray was so firmly convinced of the fidelity of his gallant Irregulars, that he not only considered all precautions on the part of his wife utterly unnecessary, but absolutely forbade her to take any, lest she should exhibit want of confidence. Mrs. Stevens, whose anxiety for her children was beyond all description, and who had already had a foretaste of what was coming in the destruction of her house by fire, felt herself unable to take any precautionary measures at all : she tried to console herself, and to place confidence in the only Arm able to protect her and her dear ones ; but many and many a tear rolled down her cheek, as she sat alone watching her children sleeping, and thought of what might befall them.

Her sister was another source of great anxiety, and added greatly to their danger. She and her husband had long ago set their hearts upon her marrying Burleigh ; but the latter,

though evidently much in love, had not come forward, and even if he did it was very doubtful how his advances would be received. As for Miss Leslie herself, I am not at liberty to disclose the exact state of her feelings; perhaps she could not have done so herself; but this I do know, that on the morning after the fire a little packet was put into her hands, which, in the confusion attending their sudden removal to Mrs. Murray's house, and consequent unsettled state of domestic affairs in that lady's establishment, she found time and opportunity to open in the privacy of her own apartment. It contained a little book of private devotional exercises to which she was especially attached (it had been her constant companion through many years and in a distant land and happy home), which she supposed had been consumed along with the rest of the property in the house, and was accompanied by a small note that ran as follows:—

‘To Miss Leslie—recovered from the fire by A. G.’

Graham's perilous adventure and courageous leap into the burning house, which she had heard her brother-in-law speak of in such high terms of admiration, flashed across her mind, and then she thought of Burleigh's apparent apathy and lack of zeal: the comparison in the young girl's mind was not favour-

able to the latter. She sat with the book in her lap, for some little time absorbed in thought; at last it seemed to occur to her that it was necessary to send an answer, so she went and fetched writing materials from the drawing-room and wrote a short note expressing her warmest gratitude for the attention.

The note being folded and enclosed, she took it out to give it to the servant, there being no one within call owing to the confusion in the household. As she passed through the drawing-room, she found it filled. Captain and Mrs. Murray were both there, and the baby roaring; her sister was also there, and her little boy, who was crying at the loss of some of his playthings he missed. Burleigh also was there, who greeted her as she entered, and seeing her taking the note into the verandah, offered to deliver it himself. She was obliged to accept the offer, as to have refused it would have excited more attention than she wished. She gave it to him unwillingly, saying, 'It is for Mr. Graham's man,' and, despite all her efforts to look calm and unconcerned, a treacherous blush crimsoned her cheeks. Her sister did not notice it; Burleigh did, and looked thoughtful as he took the note out to give it to the servant.



## CHAPTER XVII.

A FEW days after Graham was released from arrest, he started considerably before gun-fire one morning and rode out to the tomb at Chunderbagh alone. He arrived there just as the sun rose, and fastening his horse to a tree, went inside the tomb, and commenced a searching investigation of the interior of the building. He easily found the spot where the glass had been shattered by his pistol-shot on the night he had previously visited the place. There was no appearance of anyone having been there since; except that there was no aperture whatever visible in the wall. This aperture he had seen on the former occasion. After a very careful scrutiny, he discovered, or thought he discovered, one stone, the cement around which had a slight appearance of being new; he scraped off the surface with a pen-knife, and his suspicions were confirmed; the stone had been recently put in, and the new cement covered with dust or earth to give it the same appearance as the old. Diligently

and perseveringly he followed up this discovery, until he had loosened the stone sufficiently to draw it out. There was an aperture, and evidently a chamber beyond the wall; but it was too dark to distinguish its size, or form, or depth. He threw a few little stones through; they fell on a hard floor, and that was all he could learn. Without tools and assistance it was impossible to proceed further, so he replaced the stone, and leaving as few vestiges as possible of his visit and operations, he mounted his horse and rode back to Islamabad. He first went to Mr. Dacres, and told him what he had found out. The discovery, unimportant as it was in itself, seemed to the commissioner to be well worth following up, and they determined to pursue the investigation that night. It was necessary to get tools and another hand to help in using them, and they resolved to solicit Stevens's co-operation. It was arranged that Graham and Stevens, if he would go, of which there was little doubt, should start in a buggy about sunset, taking a couple of pickaxes and crow-bars and a lantern in the buggy with them, where they could be tolerably concealed, and adopt the precaution of setting off in their drive in exactly an opposite direction, to avoid arousing the suspicions of the servants, while

Mr. Dacres would set out at the same time on horseback by a different road, and meet them at the tomb shortly after nightfall.

When Stevens and Graham drove up, it was pitch dark under the shade of the trees : the neighing of a horse as they approached, however, warned them that Dacres had already arrived. They had none of them brought servants ; so, tying their animals to the trees some way apart, they set out on their errand. It was agreed that one should remain outside and keep a good look-out ; for although there was no actual danger of any sort to be apprehended, it was very desirable to avoid if possible exciting the attention of the people about, or arousing their curiosity as to the proceedings of the ' sahibs,' even though their search after a mystery should end in nothing more than the discovery of a mare's nest.

Mr. Dacres agreed to take the first watch, and commenced his look-out, keeping carefully under the darker shade of the wall of the building, and walking slowly round it so as to watch all sides. Meantime Stevens and Graham, after lighting the lamp, proceeded to investigate the scene of their intended explorations. Graham easily found the place which had attracted his attention in the morning : everything was just in the same state as

he had left it, and he very soon showed Stevens the aperture in the masonry. After this, their work was mere manual labour, and right heartily they went at it; the crowbar was inserted, and both their combined efforts directed to loosening the stones on either side. The night was intensely close and hot, and, with the exertion, the perspiration dropped from their brows like rain, as it did with the knight in Melrose Abbey when he dug up the tombstone by his unaided efforts. Once, and once only, were they disturbed, when, on a signal from Mr. Dacres, they ceased their work, and darkened the lantern in a moment. The disturbing object, however, proved nothing more than a stray bullock which accidentally wandered in that direction, and the two went at the crowbar again with redoubled zeal and energy. After about an hour and a half spent in really hard labour, they had succeeded in making an opening large enough to admit of their entering, or crawling in one by one. Graham, as the first discoverer, went in first, and held the lamp while the others followed. They found themselves in a tolerably-sized chamber, which, on the side opposite that by which they had entered, seemed to communicate with a passage. Concealing their working implements on the ground,

and seeing that their revolvers were all ready for action, they advanced along this passage. It was narrow, and so low that they were obliged to stoop; but it was quite clear of obstruction, and they advanced without halting for a distance which seemed to them nearly a quarter of a mile, though they may have been too much excited to guess very exactly. At first it was a steep descent, then level for a long distance, and at last they began to ascend, and soon found themselves breathing fresher air than they had below; and after scrambling up a small flight of old and dilapidated stone steps, they reached an apartment, apparently the lower story of a native dwelling-house, having other stories above it. From the direction they had started in—and they had taken no turning worth speaking of—Dacres concluded they must have either reached, or were coming very near, the house of Meer Ali Moorad, a wealthy and influential Mahometan resident of Islamabad, and now holding a high judicial post. He had an estate and a country seat, Mr. Dacres knew, near Chunderbagh, situated very much on the spot, which, as well as he could judge of the direction they had taken, they had now arrived at.

The comparative position of the tomb and the house rendered this the more probable.

The latter stood on an elevated plateau of alluvial soil overlooking lower ground below, on which the tomb was built; and this would account for the ascent they had made, considerably greater than the descent by which the passage commenced. The Sudder Ameen's house was built on the site of an old fort, which I shall have occasion hereafter to allude to, in ancient days the stronghold, so tradition ran, of an influential dacoitee (robber) chief, whose descendants, though long since ousted from the family property, even now retained no small share of the hereditary influence, and, if report said true, the marauding habits, of their ancestors.

In making any further progress the very utmost caution was requisite, and they proceeded in their examination as carefully as any gang of housebreakers that ever pursued their unhallowed calling with the fear of Newgate before their eyes.

At the further corner of the apartment they found themselves in, there was a door leading to a second flight of steps; up these they went, and along a passage, a sudden turn in which, however, revealed something that made them stop and deprive themselves of the little allowance of light they had indulged in up to this moment.

From the spot they were standing on they could just discern that the passage terminated immediately in front in an open gallery, open that is to say on the right-hand side, which looked down into a court-yard; on the left was a wall, but pierced at the elevation of about three feet from the floor of the gallery with a row of lattice-work windows, or carved marble screens, about a foot and a half or two feet square, which form so common an arrangement, combining use and ornament, in Oriental houses. Through this lattice-work a not very brilliant light was shining, and the fact of voices being audible from within was positive proof that the apartment was tenanted. The three explorers halted and listened attentively. They very soon became convinced of the fact that the speakers, whose voices were now plainly heard in the stillness of the night, were women; and the fact was easily followed up to the conclusion to which it led, that they had somehow or other managed to penetrate into the portion of the Mahometan gentleman's house set apart for the ladies. It was, or might prove to be, an awkward dilemma, and the three English gentlemen, under a simultaneous impulse of fear of being discovered in such a discreditable position, severally, though simultane-

ously, turned to retrace their steps: as they did so, however, the words 'kaffir' and 'feringhee,' uttered in loud tones by one of the female speakers, and coupled with epithets as little to be mistaken as they were uncomplimentary to the class alluded to, and followed by shouts and screams of laughter, induced them to stop. The repetition of the phrases and of the laughter induced them to advance still closer to the spot whence they proceeded. Once under the lattice window, it was the easiest thing in the world to raise themselves a little from the stooping position they were forced to assume, and look through the screen at the scene within, without the smallest fear of discovery from the inmates.

It was a curious spectacle, and a very novel one too, that met their gaze. Few Englishmen, certainly none of the three present, had ever before looked undisturbed and unnoticed into the sanctum sanctorum, the penetralia of a Mahometan gentleman: nor, had they been discovered, would they have lived to record their experience for the benefit of their fellow-countrymen and their posterity. Shall I borrow the language and sentiments of Tom Moore, or plagiarise from Don Juan, to describe what they did see? It was nothing very wonderful, after all. There were certainly half-



a-dozen or so of Eastern beauties, in all the loveliness, whatever that was, of unveiled features: they were in dishabille too, though clad sufficiently to show that the virtue of modesty is a plant indigenous in the female mind, and grows of itself luxuriantly enough, without requiring any of the concomitant influences of civilisation, as it is called, to produce or foster it. Pretty they certainly were not, according to our ideas of beauty; but tastes differ much among inhabitants of different climes. Unlike the fair daughters of the West, who under similar circumstances would probably have been engaged in some kind of handiwork, while they carried on such conversation as they are generally supposed to indulge in at times when none of the lords of the creation are present to hear and take a share in it, the ladies of Meer Ali Moorad were amusing themselves, some with the never-failing hooka, and others—tell it not in the saloons of our Western Vanity Fair—in chewing betel-nut, ever and anon in a most unlady-like manner expectorating upon the floor, like so many American gentlemen.

They were reclining or sitting upon a soft rich carpet, supported by cushions covered with velvet, and many of them ornamented with tinsel and silver filagree work, in all

sorts of different attitudes, doubtless more or less graceful, but such as they certainly would not have assumed had they been aware that three pair of eyes belonging to uncircumcised Philistines of Feringhees were gazing upon their charms. Their voices were soft and musical, as the voices of young girls generally are, in whichever hemisphere born; and two or three guitars, such as they use in the East, which were lying on the ground, showed that they occasionally indulged a taste for music. At the moment, however, when they are introduced to my readers, they were all engaged in talking, and the subject of discussion seemed one of great interest, and withal amusing, to judge by the shouts of merriment that had just attracted the attention of their unseen visitors. The subject of conversation was nothing less than what at that time formed the common topic of discussion in the houses and among the retinues of most Mahometan gentlemen in India, viz. the anticipated annihilation of British supremacy, and the consequent destruction or capture of all the English in the country.

‘Will it not be fine!’ said one, clapping her hands with delight at the idea. ‘He says he will be a great hakim (ruler) then, and we shall all be queens; we shall each of us have

six slaves, and the finest muslins from Dacca and shawls from Cashmere.'

'He promised me a necklace of pearls,' said another, interrupting the first speaker, who having lost the ear of the house, was destined not to recover her advantage for some little time; the ladies were all eager to talk, but none wanted particularly to listen, and so the conversation went on, sometimes two or three speaking together, so that in detailing a few of the remarks that were made, it is impossible to give them their own effect, or represent the order in which they were spoken. Each one, however, seemed anxious to communicate the information she had for the benefit of the rest, and it is not at all improbable that in the very laudable desire to appear better informed than her companions, each fair speaker may have drawn a little on her imagination.

'Ah, these Feringhee ladies are very proud; they will be humbled, by the blessing of Alla.'

'I am told they go about like men, immodest creatures, and eat and drink without blushing along with men who are not their husbands or their brothers.'

'Every man has only one—ha ha!' This produced a chorus of musical merriment.

'They are very beautiful, though,' said a

lady who had not much to boast of in that respect, and knew it.

‘Beautiful! no such thing: as beautiful as dancing-girls that expose their charms to everyone.’

‘What will they do with them, when their husbands and brothers have been sent to hell?’

‘We shall have them for slaves.’

‘English soldiers are very strong—regular devils.’

‘Psha! wait till the emperor is proclaimed.’

‘There is some one—a great man—come here to-night. Our lord has a great assembly.’

‘Who is it?’ asked two or three of the last speakers, addressing her at once.

‘I shall hear to-night,’ said a blushing maiden who sat apart from the rest, and seemed rather unpopular among her companions, ‘and will tell you all to-morrow.’

‘Psha, you!’ said an elderly lady from the opposite side of the apartment, who had the seat of honour, and carried a good deal of dignity in her manner, though her face wore an expression of great sadness, perhaps from a habit of brooding inwardly over the fleeting nature of Oriental female charms: ‘as if our lord would tell a girl like you anything of important state secrets—lions do not consult with cats.’

‘No, not when they are old and ugly,’ retorted the offended beauty, pursing up her lips. But public opinion—and public opinion carries weight even in a harem—was against her.

The ill-natured remark, though perhaps called for, fell like a wet blanket upon the glowing spirits of the little party: there was a deep silence, amid which the offended lady gathered up the loose folds of her dress in her hand, threw a corner of it over her face so as to veil it, and rising with considerable dignity, walked slowly out of the apartment. The rest continued their conversation for some time in whispers, till by degrees the silence was broken, and now and then another began to speak a little loudly, and ere five minutes had elapsed the conversation was being carried on as briskly and merrily as ever.

There is no need, however, for me to detail more of it. The listeners continued at their post, apparently much interested, till Graham, thinking their line of retreat perfectly open and secure, determined on extending his exploration, and creeping along the passage, bending his body so as to keep underneath the lattice-work windows, he advanced several paces along the gallery and ascended a flight of stone steps at the other end. The result

seemed perfectly satisfactory, for he soon after descended partially, and beckoned to his companions to follow.

During the excitement caused by this successful attempt at espionage, Mr. Dacres had once or twice reflected on the peculiarity of his position, should he and his companions be discovered and their retreat cut off. He, a commissioner of a division, obtaining entrance surreptitiously into a Mahometan gentleman's house, penetrating even to the ladies' apartments, watching and listening to the conversation of the inmates—should he be discovered, how would his conduct be regarded by his superiors? Was sufficient justification to be found in the peculiar state of public affairs? Had matters really reached a stage at which, as in love and war, every stratagem might be deemed fair play?—evidently not. To investigate the means by which the trick, so important in its political consequences, had been played upon the Nawab—to explore a subterranean passage and find where it terminated, was a legitimate employment for any British officer; but here the duty ended. All beyond was merely satisfying curiosity, under certain views of the case unpardonable. He had therefore determined not to accompany his two friends any farther, and if possible to

prevail upon them to desist and return. Stevens, however, was resolved to go on, and followed Graham; nor did he notice, till he had joined him at the foot of the steps, that Dacres had retreated in the opposite direction. Thinking he had left them from prudential motives, merely to watch lest any accident should lead to discovery and interfere with their line of retreat, he did not think of returning or waiting for him to follow.

Graham and Stevens then continued cautiously to proceed, the former several yards in advance of the latter, till they had reached the summit of the steps, and found themselves upon a narrow landing or ledge of about two feet in width, that ran round an apartment of large dimensions, within a short distance of the roof. Stooping, or rather kneeling upon this, and stretching forward so as to extend their heads just over the ledge, they looked down upon the inmates of the room, who were seated some twelve or fourteen feet below them on the floor. A lamp was burning, and it was the light from this which first attracted Graham's attention, and now enabled the two officers to scan at their leisure the features of the party below, and watch their motions, while they overheard almost every word of their conversation with the utmost ease.

Meer Ali Moorad was there, and taking a prominent part in the discussion which was going on; there were two or three other natives of standing and property in the neighbourhood, all Mahometans; the only one Graham recognised as from cantonments was Asgar Ali, a native officer belonging to Murray's Irregular Cavalry. The presiding genius of the place, however, was the same individual who has already been introduced to the reader as the messenger whose interview with the Nawab has been described, and who suggested his visit to the tomb. This man had a map or plan, the exact nature or extent of which the two officers could not discern, but it was evident from the allusions he made to it, pointing out at one time to Delhi, at another to places in their immediate neighbourhood, that it was a map of a portion, at any rate, of Hindustan.

It appeared that this man was in the counsels of the chiefs or prime movers in the rebellion, or at any rate wished to be thought so, for he was drawing out a sketch of the operations the rebel chiefs had fixed upon. These plans were almost as wild as could well be imagined; and the inventor or author of them seemed to have left out of his calculations altogether the chance of successful resist-



ance by British soldiers in any part of India. The revolution, according to him, was to be effected in a very simple way—by the successive rise, at every station in the presidency where there were native troops stationed, of all the sepoy army. Anything like a skilful combination or well-organised scheme of rebellion, any preparations to guard against a reverse or remedy a false move, or any attempt or plan to secure cooperation among the different bodies of rebel troops who would be separated by long distances and large tracts of country from each other,—all this was utterly wanting. The plot consisted of a mad attempt, by the exercise of brute force and diabolical treachery, to overpower the English in detail, and the burden of the song, the one point of most importance to which this monster in human form again and again reverted in his lesson of blood, was indiscriminate slaughter of the men, and capture of the women and plunder. He went over all the old arguments, so often repeated, to prove the feasibility of the plan proposed : alluded to our disasters in Affghanistan, as the event which demonstrated not only the possibility, but the facility of effecting our destruction ; he told again the lying story of our recent utter defeat in the Crimea, and the

inability of England to send another man to reinforce the army in India; and triumphantly related, what was now no news to his hearers, the account of the success which had attended the Meerut outbreak.

An interruption took place in this part of the conversation, for the first time since Stevens and Graham had been witnesses of it. This was caused by Meer Ali Moorad, who angrily exclaimed, as the stranger mentioned Meerut,

‘The curse of Alla light on them—the fools! They have ruined all by their folly and impatience.’

‘How so?’ said Asgar Ally. ‘On the contrary, the success has been great; have we not the Delhi arsenal in our possession, and are not the hearts of the Kaffirs like water in consequence?’

‘And will not the sword of Islam be drawn now in every country, in Iran (Persia), and Roum (Turkey), and Sham (Syria)?’ added another, whose sparkling eyes literally shone with the fire of fanaticism.

‘You speak like a fool,’ said Meer Ali Moorad with a gesture of impatience and scorn. ‘Alla was working his plan gloriously for the total destruction of the Kaffirs and the victory of Islam; but the time was not yet

come. The crop was growing, but not ripened; and he who reaps before the harvest-time is a fool and accursed of God. Speak, Haji, and tell us what you heard in the holy city, on which be the blessing of the Prophet and his descendants!’

An old man with long white beard and most venerable appearance, who was sitting modestly, rather in the background, being thus appealed to, leaned forward and said,

‘What Meer Ali Moorad says is true—the time when the standard of Islam was to be unfurled is not now. Alla bade us wait till the will of Heaven was signified.’

‘How?’ said Asgar Ally, rather sharply, turning upon the speaker.

‘By the manifestation of the holy Imam (leader),’ replied the Haji, without turning his eyes upon Asgar Ally.

‘Heaven knows how many Imams we are to look for,’ replied Asgar Ally; ‘my Pir (spiritual pastor) never told me anything about Imams: but I know it was prophesied the reign of the infidels was to come to an end a hundred years after it began. They say the hundred years are up. I am no scholar, and do not know; but if we are to look for an Imam, tell us, is he to be a Punjabee

Imam, or one from Iran or Roum? You Hajis know everything.'

These last words were spoken in a defiant tone, which the old Haji did not relish.

'Speak not profanely,' said Meer Ali Moorad: 'the venerable Haji has visited the holy cities, which you have not; he has gone through the ceremonies, and at the tomb of the holy Prophet himself, with whom be peace, he has seen a vision.'

'A vision!' said Asgar Ally with a sneer. 'My Pir taught me the sons of Islam were vouchsafed no visions nowadays.'

'That Pir of yours must have been a wonderful saint,' said the stranger angrily. 'Did he teach you, among his other lessons, to revile the aged and the holy men who make the pilgrimage to the sacred city?'

'No; but he taught me to put no faith in renegade Feringhees,' said Asgar Ally, passionately.

The stranger, to whom these words were addressed, made a vigorous and evident effort to restrain his anger; he bit his lips till the blood almost came from them. The rest were at first apprehensive of violence, but they seemed fully alive to the injury that would result to the common cause from a fracas between any of their number. The stranger, at whom this

bitter taunt had been cast, at length mastered his indignation sufficiently to speak. He turned to address his companions, looking away from Asgar Ally.

‘Now, listen,’ he said. ‘I denounce that man as a traitor to the cause. I say he is a traitor—a false, lying traitor, and a secret friend of the Nazarenes, though he pretends openly to be with us. I denounce him, and I warn you all.’

Asgar Ally replied by a scornful laugh.

‘This is but a bad augury for the success of our cause,’ said Meer Ali Moorad, ‘thus falling out among ourselves; let us be at peace. Asgar Ally, we trust you; our friend has spoken in the warmth of his anger—heed not his words: and you, Mirza Sahib, forget what has passed. Let us be friends.’

‘Ay, ay, let us be friends,’ chimed in the rest, all except the old Haji, who kept aloof, and the Mirza, who remained silent.

‘Asgar Ally is true to our cause,’ continued Meer Ali Moorad. ‘I will answer for him with my life. He is a friend of the Feringhees—what then? Have we not all been friends of the Kaffirs? We are slaves of destiny: while it pleased Alla we should bear the yoke, we bore it; now the time is at hand for us to throw it off.’

‘I tell you he is a traitor,’ continued the stranger, pointing at the same time at his opponent. ‘I tell you, he used to go nightly to his sahib and report to him everything he heard in the lines from the lips of the faithful, and to-night when he returns home he will relate all that has passed here. I know it. I have spies everywhere, and they have watched him. I warn you; now you know whom you have among you.’

They looked enquiringly at Asgar Ally, and remained silent, as if expecting him to clear himself.

Asgar Ally sat silent awhile; then feeling that it was necessary to speak, he said, keeping up the same defiant air he had worn all along—

‘You look at me as if you wanted me to speak: do you trust a renegade Kaffir, and doubt the faithful follower of the Prophet? It is indifferent to me what you believe, or what he says. Distrust me if you will, I want not to be of your counsels; still I tell you he lies. When with my regiment, I do visit my sahib often, and he trusts me; but my heart is with the sons of Islam, and with the confidence with which I am treated by the Feringhees, my single voice and arm are worth more to the cause than fifty whitefaced unbelievers

that you trust in. I am of the "ekdin" (one religion), but I warn you I will have no needless shedding of blood; I will have no slaughter of defenceless men. The sahibs are kaffirs, and accursed of God, and destiny has marked them for destruction, and their rule has come to an end. But we have received many favours from them; they are brave as lions, and their words are true as steel, and they have taught us much; and the curse of God be on those that shed their blood, or the blood of their sons and daughters, wantonly!

The deep and ominous murmur of dissent with which the sentiments of the speaker were received, gave evidence at once of the real spirit that animated their breasts. The stranger looked round with an expression of triumph in his face; he seemed to say, 'Did I not speak the truth? will you trust him now?'

'Asgar Ally speaks the truth,' said the old Haji, the first to break the silence. 'There must be no wanton shedding of blood, but the men must be slain, and the women are lawful prize of the faithful in a *jehad* (holy war).'

'Hear him,' said the stranger, 'hear the Haji; the words in his mouth are the truth of Islam: we will slay the men, and the women, fair as houris as they are, shall be our reward.'

‘It will never do,’ said the fanatic who had spoken before, ‘never do. They are a race of Shaitans (devils); the men are Shaitans, and the women are like the men. The poet says,

God hath given a like nature to male and female of one kind.

Other races you may enslave, but the Feringhees never: by the sword only can ye deal with them, and Heaven preserve us from having a tigress in the harem! Male and female, young and old, root and branch, they must be exterminated. As long as there is one left in the country, you will never be at peace.’

The stranger laughed. ‘The ladies of Iran and Cashmere are fair, but the daughters of the West are fairer; I have a commission from the prince to select the prettiest of the Feringhee ladies of Islamabad for the royal harem—the prettiest and the youngest. Ha, ha! these ladies, that you call tigresses and she-devils, will grow tame under the care of the — But where is Asgar Ally?’ The others looked up and around—he was gone.

‘The traitor, he has gone to the Kaffirs to tell them all.’

‘He has nothing to tell them,’ said the stranger contemptuously — nothing that they do not know already. They all know the end



has come, and their hearts are turned to water contemplating it; but they are powerless to do anything, and of our plans Asgar Ally can tell nothing, for he knows nothing.'

Meer Ali Moorad did not seem to think so. 'He will denounce us to the magistrate, and we shall be seized.'

With a look of concentrated scorn, as if he was speaking to some animal infinitely beneath his notice, the stranger turned sharply round, and said,

'Magistrate! who is magistrate here now? Do you think these Feringhees do not know you to be their enemy, do you think they trust you? No, but they are helpless: how can they seize you?—send a party of sepoy, perhaps, with a whiteface at their head. Psha! I am the only ruler here, for I have the king's firman. I am Hakim-ul-hakim governor of the Soobah of Islamabad.'

'The Nawab is yet faithful to the Kaffirs,' replied Meer Ali Moorad, with the vision of a halter as it seemed still before his eyes; 'his men might be prevailed upon to seize me; and I am a servant to the Feringhees, and have eaten their salt for ten years: they will hang me if they catch me.'

'The Nawab's men are faithful to the cause, though he is wavering. Be at peace, Ali

Moorad; be not afraid: a woman's tongue even shall not hurt you.'

'Nay, I am not afraid; but still, if Asgar Ally does denounce us, I shall be the first to be seized. Insha Alla—by the will of God—I will ride off to-night, and keep away till I see things safe.'

'Ay, ride off; it will be the safest plan if you fear: but, now Asgar Ally is gone, I will tell you what I have had in my mind, and what I called you here together for. I hear the sepoys say they will plunder the cantonment and the Nawab's palace, and then march to Allahabad.'

'Yes, yes, that is what they say,' said one or two voices.

'Then tell them, you who are here when the day of deliverance arrives, for perhaps I shall be away—tell them not to touch the Nawab's palace; not to touch so much as a brick out of the walls, nor a sod upon any ground that belongs to him; and if they march to Allahabad, they march to certain death. The emperor's orders are for them to go at once to Delhi, and to bring as little with them as possible, and, above all, no prisoners. The sahibs are all to be slain, but the women and children kept. There will be no fighting here, but there will be elsewhere, and I must go to other places where there is danger to the cause

from the strength of the infidels. Here they are but a handful, a few sheep in the shambles. The sepoys will know the time to begin when the messengers arrive with the sacred symbols. We shall have no fighting now, but hereafter there will be trouble in the land. Our struggle is for Islam; and these brute beasts of Hindoo soldiers will raise disturbances, and much blood must be shed. But all the troops must be sent to Delhi, and while the sepoys are there employed in exterminating the infidels, who will collect all their numbers, and they are but a handful, and break their heads against the stone walls of the defence of Islam, the districts will be reduced to order, and levies raised under the command of men who will be faithful to the king; and so we shall be strong enough to reduce to subjection the marauders and rebels that will be found among the Hindoo sepoys.'

'And the Nawab?'

'The Nawab will not declare himself; and if he does not give his adherence to the cause within the prescribed time, I have authority to confiscate his estates, and make them over to the man that does the cause the greatest service. These are the names of those who are faithful and whom you may trust,'—and he proceeded to unfold a paper he drew from

his vest, and laid on the ground before him. Graham and Stevens listened with their attention strained to the utmost, not to lose a word of the valuable information that was about to be disclosed. That information, however, they were not destined to profit by, for a slight movement, the slightest possible, from behind, caused the latter to turn his head gently; the next instant Graham felt his arm touched. He too drew back his head, and looked in the direction indicated by his companion. Stevens was leaning upon his elbow, pointing with a strange expression in his face to the space behind the spot where they had been reclining. The sight that met Graham's eyes was certainly one to astonish, if not to intimidate him, under the peculiar circumstances they were in. There, with his arms folded, and the quaintest expression of amusement, mingled with some respect, and evident pleasure at having the eavesdroppers so completely at his mercy, stood Asgar Ally himself. Graham started involuntarily, cursing his folly the instant afterwards to himself for being so incautious, and well he might, for the sudden movement caused a piece of the plaster of the cornice upon which they had been leaning to give way, and it fell, scattering dust and small fragments of plaster and cement upon the heads of the

party below. They, of course, all looked up. Asgar Ally was in the background, and could not be seen by any one below. Graham and Stevens, too, had happily moved out of sight. Just at this moment a bat providentially flew across the room from the rafters above. Those below, noticing the bird's flight immediately after the plaster had fallen, supposed that the bat was the cause, and ceased to think any more about it.

Simultaneously it occurred to Graham and Stevens, after the momentary excitement caused by the falling plaster and the bat's flight had passed off, what was to be done with the man who had thus unexpectedly become acquainted with the secret of their presence there—or rather, what would he do to them? for he had but to give the alarm, and, shut in as they were in such an awkward position, and in possession of such dangerous information, it would be but the work of a few minutes for the conspirators to overcome them and effect their destruction. Acting under the impulse of the moment and the feeling that animated both, they looked enquiringly at Asgar Ally. He understood them, and pointed in the direction they had come in a way that showed he meant them to take their departure, and at the same time that he would allow

them to do so without raising the alarm. Under the conviction that they were completely in his power, they obeyed, and moved noiselessly away, followed by their newly-found and unwelcome companion, down the steps and along the narrow corridor.

As Dacres had taken away the lantern with him, they had considerable difficulty in groping their way back in the dark. They succeeded in doing so, however, without interruption, Stevens leading the way, and Asgar Ally bringing up the rear. It was not till they reached, or fancied they had reached, the chamber at the entrance of the passage, that they ventured even to whisper to one another: all they said was,

‘Where’s Dacres?’

‘I don’t know.’

‘Go on,’ said Asgar Ally, speaking in a louder tone. ‘There is danger in staying here longer.’

It was no easy matter to go in such pitchy darkness, neither of them knowing much about the way. There was a flight of stone steps, Stevens recollected, leading up from the chamber to the passage; but how many or where they began he could not recollect. He went on, however, cautiously and stealthily, groping along with his hands extended, found

the steps, and reached the floor safely. As he did so, his foot made a slight, very slight, noise.

‘Is that you?’ said a voice whispering from the darkness.

‘Yes, but in Heaven’s name give us a light and let us get off.’


Dacres shifted aside the shade from the dark lantern, to let the light fall upon his friend : it fell on Asgar Ally’s gaunt figure, as he reached the summit of the stairs. Dacres shut it instantly, with a suppressed exclamation of astonishment.

‘Friends,’ whispered Stevens close beside him, ‘we are discovered, that’s all; let us make haste out—this man comes with us.’

The commissioner needed but little persuasion. Again the lamp was allowed to throw its friendly light on the surrounding objects, and, aided by it, the adventurous explorers reached the entrance to the passage. Dacres went down part of the way, and held the light up to assist the rest; they descended, but not before Stevens had cast a glance round him, and saw, what they had not perceived before, that the chamber they were in was much more spacious than they had supposed, and was well stocked for at least four feet from the walls with boxes of ammunition, and a large collection of muskets and bayonets.

They were arranged in the utmost order all round the chamber, as if it had been an armoury. Then, glancing again to see that Asgar Ally was following, he descended, followed by Graham. No sooner had the latter got down four of the steps, so as to have his head below the level of the floor, than all three started at hearing a trap-door above them shut down with some little force, and a bolt the instant after shot into its socket. Asgar Ally had remained above; they were alone in the passage.

Explanation and prognostications were all left till they had traversed the passage, and stood again in the tomb, whence they had set out on their exploration. Even there they only indulged in a few brief sentences, for, fearful of the dawn coming upon them before the traces of their entrance into the passage had been obliterated, they all set to work to replace the stones that had been taken out, and conceal the marks of their recent operations with a covering of mud, &c. This was done hastily but carefully and effectually, and then they all three went outside, to indulge, as they wended their way homewards, in such reflections and discussion among themselves as the recent events they had passed through were calculated to excite.





## CHAPTER XVIII.

THE first half of the way back to Islamabad they traversed at a foot pace, Stevens and Graham being engaged in relating to Dacres the substance of the conversation they had overheard. As the dawn broke, they quickened their pace, and parted eventually about a mile from the station, Dacres taking the nearest road to his own house, and the others to the cantonment. The former, now alone, began seriously to consider what steps he should adopt. He had desired Graham on arriving to go straight to Murray, and find out from that officer what sort of character Asgar Ally bore, what his rank was, and whether he was then in his lines or absent, and if absent on what pretext. In reply to his queries, Graham learnt that Asgar Ally, who was described by his commandant as a 'first-rate fellow,' a native officer, was at that time away from his regiment on yearly furlough; and that he was really absent at his home, he, Captain Murray, was certain, for two or three days before he

had received a letter from his brother from his village in Rohilcund, about some money remittance made through the government treasury, that had not duly come to hand. This information reached Dacres in the course of the forenoon ; meantime during his ride, after separating from his companions, he had had time to resolve upon his course of action. This was to order Harley to issue a search-warrant, and to execute it with a party of burkandazes (literally, 'hurlers of lightning,' a term used to designate the armed police maintained by the civil authorities in India for local and police duties) superintended by himself, and to investigate thoroughly the interior economy of Meer Ali Moorad's house, and arrest all suspicious characters he might find there. Harley had no sooner heard the account of the last night's discovery, and the duty that lay before him, than he set about to carry it out at once. By the time he had finished a hearty breakfast and equipped himself, his favourite horse was ready saddled, and a party of twenty mounted burkandazes were drawn up in the court-yard waiting for orders.

Mr. Dacres would have much preferred calling out regular troops for this service, but there were objections to this step so strong as

to overrule his wishes and set aside his first-formed plans. In the first place, the brigadier would have to be applied to officially; ten to one he would make some frivolous objections, and time would be lost. A good deal of excitement would necessarily be aroused in the cantonment and bazaar by the mission of an armed party into the district on an unknown duty, while the very fact of its being unknown, and a mystery, would increase instead of allaying the excitement and fears of the more timid part of the community: there was also very great danger of the call upon native troops to act against their countrymen, bringing on the crisis it was desirable to stave off as long as possible.

The party Harley took with him, on the other hand, was quite sufficient for all the purposes it was required for; the men were at any rate as much to be trusted as the regular sepoy, and as they would be engaged on their legitimate duties, the fact of their being despatched on such an errand under the command of the magistrate, who would accompany them, was likely to attract much less attention than if a formal requisition for military aid, involving all the concomitant bustle of preparation, was made to the cantonment authorities.

They started about eight o'clock, and nothing occurred to diversify the monotony of their morning ride till they reached the spot where the road turned off, leading directly up to Ali Moorad's house, and from the direction of which there could remain no doubt as to the destination of the party. Harley was cantering along a couple of yards ahead of his men, who followed four or five abreast in no very particular military array, when he was startled by the report of a matchlock; at the same instant the peculiar whiz or 'ping' of a bullet flying through the air, close to his ear, told him that the shot, if intentional, had only just missed its mark. He halted, and confronted his men, but failed to discover from whom the shot had come. At first they declared no shot had been fired; but finding it useless to persist in the denial of so obvious a fact, one of the men in the front rank, a good-for-nothing, low-looking Mahometan, acknowledged that his matchlock had gone off by mistake. Harley ordered him to dismount and give up his arms; he then made him over in arrest to a non-commissioned officer, and leaving a couple of men to look after the prisoner, turned his horse's head and cantered along the road again, followed by the men, as if nothing had occurred.

Just as he reached the ground outside the house, he was joined by Graham, who at Dacres's request had ridden out from cantonments to assist Harley in finding his way to the corridor where the two officers had concealed themselves the night before, and so get the clue to the secret chamber in which the arms and ammunition were deposited. Posting the horsemen outside the house, with orders to allow no one to enter in or to come out, Harley, executing his own search-warrant, and accompanied by Graham and the jemadar, or native commandant of the police, entered the premises. The house was perfectly empty: the only living creature they found inside was a half-starved pariah dog, that barked at them from the centre of the court-yard and ran away when they approached it. Not only had all the occupants deserted the place, but they had taken everything moveable with them, leaving nothing but the bare walls. They went from one room to another, the clanking of their heavy riding-boots and spurs echoing from wall to wall, and proclaiming the solitude that reigned there. On reaching the apartment in which Graham had the night before seen the conclave of conspirators assembled, he looked about for some trace of

their recent visit, but none was forthcoming. A stone staircase in one corner of the room led up to the corridor where they had been stationed: they ascended, and passed round three sides of the room, looking down upon it from the ledge, which was carried all round, and which on the fourth side formed the corridor leading to the magazine below. As they went down the steps and along the passage, they stopped at the lattice-work screen through which they had espied the conference of the ladies and overheard their conversation. Beyond all was darkness, and they were obliged to make use of the lantern they had brought with them. In the chamber at the further end they found something to reward them for what seemed likely enough at one time to prove a bootless errand: the general clearance had not reached so far as this. The room was well stocked with muskets, small arms, and boxes of ball ammunition, such as are served out by government for the use of its soldiery, all packed in magazine ammunition boxes, with the year in which they had been issued inscribed on the lid. The words 'Delhi Magazine' showed the arsenal whence these munitions of war had been supplied. There were about three hundred muskets

there, complete with accoutrements, and about thirty boxes of ammunition, containing upwards of sixty thousand cartridges.

There was only one other place to be explored, and that was the subterraneous passage. Dacres had had his own reasons for keeping the knowledge they had acquired as much to themselves as possible. Harley therefore dismissed the jemadar, with orders to get the men into their saddles; and when the sound of his retreating footsteps told them he was out of hearing and of sight, the two proceeded to unfasten the massive bolt that secured the trap-door, and opened it. Harley held it up, while Graham, lamp in hand, went down and explored the whole passage as far as its termination. There was nothing to be seen; so, after reclosing and refastening the trap-door, they ascended to the upper air, and made the best of their way out. It was impossible to remove the ammunition and arms without means of conveyance. Harley therefore determined to leave it, till he could send carts next day and bring it all away. Meantime he would scour the country, and endeavour to pick up some tidings of the late tenants of the deserted domain. Graham, having work in cantonments, went off in another direction. Harley's plans were good;

but before he could carry them out, events had occurred which interfered considerably with their execution. So true it is, that 'man proposes, but God disposes.'

The commissioner of Islamabad had, what was too rare unfortunately among officers of high standing and in responsible posts, a clear head combined with great mental energy and plenty of moral courage. He did not shrink from responsibility. It was evident to him now, that matters had all but reached a climax in his district. Before very long, the mask would be thrown aside, the mutinous soldiery would display their true colours, and the peace of the whole district, as well as the lives of all the Europeans at Islamabad, would be in the greatest peril. The brigadier, he knew, would be of no assistance either as a counsellor or coadjutor. Colonel Wetherall was but little better, as long as his men had not broken out into open mutiny. As soon as they had declared themselves, Dacres had the greatest hope from the colonel's military experience, and well-tryed courage and coolness in danger; but until he could be divested of the idea that his men were to be depended upon, he was useless. The other commandants were just the same, except that they lacked the age and experience of the colonel, and were, if



possible, more firmly convinced even than he of the utter impossibility of their men behaving otherwise than as good and loyal soldiers of the State.

It was a source of considerable gratification, that the Nawab, whose influence it was difficult to overrate, had as yet shown no outward sign of disaffection : indeed, it was evident, from the way he had been alluded to by the conspirators at Meer Ali Moorad's house, that he had as yet not thrown in his lot with the rebels. His alliance was important : having no hope of effecting any good result by interfering with the cantonment people, Dacres resolved to confine himself for the present to his own particular line of duty, and strengthen the bonds between the Nawab of Islamabad and the British government by every possible means. He accordingly despatched a messenger to him with a letter, saying he was anxious to have a personal conference with him, and would call during the course of the day with that view. The reply came as he expected—the Nawab would be delighted to receive the commissioner at any hour. So the commissioner went, and was received with all customary state and ceremony.

Anxious to have an opportunity of discussing matters in a place where there was no

possibility of their being overheard, Mr. Dacres proposed adjournment to the garden. As Oriental politeness dictated, the distinguished visitor had but to express a wish to have it gratified, and to the garden they went, and seated themselves upon a stone seat or bench in an alcove built open towards the west, with 'khuskhus tatties' in full play between the interstices of the pillars that supported the roof. The temperature was delightful, and under the invigorating influence of the cool and scented breeze the two began their confabulation on political matters, a portion of which I shall take the trouble to transcribe.

'I need not conceal from you, Nawab Sahib,' commenced the commissioner, plunging at once *in medias res*—a plan which he much preferred to beating about the bush, and dropping hints and innuendoes,—'that the present is a time of very considerable anxiety to myself, and to all officers of the British government in high and responsible situations.'

The Nawab bowed assent. Mr. Dacres went on—

'The temporary success of the outbreak at Meerut and Delhi has of course given rise to a great deal of excitement, and although the

mutiny will doubtless be put down shortly, yet it is not improbable that there will be disturbances in other parts of the country besides Delhi, and maybe much bloodshed.'

'Certainly,' replied the other, with another inclination of the head.

'Now I want to ask you, in a plain straightforward way, as you must know a great deal more of the feeling of your countrymen than I do, how the people in these parts are affected, and what prospect do you think there is of our weathering the storm?'

'You have asked me in a straightforward manner,' replied the Nawab: 'you have driven your arrow straight towards the mark,—I will do the same. How many English' (the Nawab began to use the word 'Feringhee,' but corrected himself and said 'Ungrezan') are there in Hindustan?'

'I can hardly tell just now: perhaps five thousand.'

'Good; and how many natives?'

'They are said to be a hundred and twenty millions.'

'It is well. How many sepoys are there in this presidency?'

'From one to two hundred thousand, I suppose, at a rough guess.'

'Good; and how many English soldiers?'

‘ That I cannot tell you: perhaps two thousand between Delhi and Calcutta.’

‘ How came you in possession of Hindustan?’

‘ By the will of Providence, and our own right hands.’

‘ And if it is the will of Alla that your rule should cease, what then?’

‘ Why, it will cease.’

‘ Do you not see the will of Heaven manifested?’

‘ How?’

‘ That you, men renowned for wisdom, and strong and wealthy, have raised an army of two hundred thousand soldiers! You have placed yourselves in their hands, and yet you act as if you were rulers of the country! The raj is not the British raj—it is the sepoys’ raj, and so it has been for the last five years. While the sepoys are faithful, your raj is firm; when they are tired of you and want a raj of their own, you must go.’

‘ Then you think the whole sepoy army is combined against us?’

‘ They have been combined for many years.’

‘ You think they will endeavour to destroy us?’

‘ There is no need to ask that question.’

‘ Then how shall you and other influential members of the native aristocracy comport

yourselves? Do you, too, turn on your benefactors, or do you remain loyal?’

‘We do not turn on our benefactors. We, the Mahometans, possessed the empire; you English deprived us of it: if we recover it when God gives us the chance, do we turn upon benefactors because we take that which was ours before you took it from us?’

‘What, Nawab! are you, too, lost to all sense of honour, gratitude, faith? Are you, too, one of those miserable, ungrateful, perjured villains hated alike by God and man?’

The Nawab laughed: it was a gentle musical laugh—not a sound of triumph, nor a laugh of scorn.

‘You mistake me,’ he said. ‘The policy of your government has ever been to elevate the lower classes, and weaken and degrade the upper. You have placed us no less than yourselves entirely in their power; and now that they have found out their power, and seem inclined to use it, you would come to us to aid you!’

‘You are right, Nawab,’ said Dacres, catching rather too eagerly for a skilled diplomatist at the argument placed within his reach. ‘We have now a common cause. The lower classes, headed by the native soldiery, will turn against us; if we fall, the native aristocracy falls with

us. Those of them who are wise will cast their influence into the scale with us.'

'Wise men do not put a sword into the hand of their enemies to slay them. Why should we rush on our own destruction?'

'You speak, Nawab, as if you were doubtful of the issue of the event. There can be no doubt about that. The resources of Great Britain are sufficient to put down a rebellion ten times as formidable as this is likely to prove, even if it turns out the worst that we anticipate. If need be, England could conquer all Asia.'

'What! weakened as she is by the Russian war?'

'The Russian war has rather added to her strength than diminished it. It has shown us our weak point; it has pointed out the different things that were wanting in our military system to make that system perfect. England will now be more powerful than she ever was: besides, she has a firm alliance with France.'

'Ha! France—is it so?'

'It is. Even now a French and English force is on its way to China: and the alliance between the two nations is firm and lasting.'

'And Russia?'

'Russia is crippled. It will be years before

she recovers what she lost in the Crimea. Besides, in this rebellion we shall have the sympathies of all civilised nations on our side. Do not allow yourself to be deceived by stories men tell you. We have no design against the religion of the native population.'

'I never believed that.'

'As soon as the news reaches England, troops will flock out in numbers: before six months are over, there will be a lac of European soldiers in this country. With us it is a mere question of time. Can we hold out till they arrive? If we cannot, they will have to reconquer the country, and avenge our death—and the vengeance they will take will be sweeping. If we are aided by the aristocracy of the country, by such men as yourself, we can hold out.'

'How can we aid you?' exclaimed the Nawab, thoroughly excited. 'How can I aid you? have I guns—have I ammunition—have I an army? have you not deprived me of all these? and now you talk about my aiding you!'

'Your influence in the district is enormous. You have merely to issue firmans to the native authorities all through the district, declaring your intention of remaining staunch to the British government, and calling on

them to remain quiet, and to aid it too; and thus all our communications will be kept open, our authority will be respected, our lives and property will be secured. Give me permission to occupy this place, this fortified garden, and to bring all the ladies and families here where they may easily be protected, and give me money to raise new levies, and you will have done all that is needed. I will do the rest. On the other hand, if you side against us, what will you gain? The chances are, the first thing the sepoys do after mutinying—for mutiny they doubtless will, at least the greater part of them—will be very likely to loot your house and property: if they do not, you will be completely in their power, and be always apprehensive that, bent on plunder, they may any day insure your destruction and the disgrace of your family.'

The Nawab appeared deeply impressed with all he heard. He remained for a long time silent, wrapt in thought. Then, looking up, he shook his head sadly and replied,

'Your words are fine, sahib, but I have had a revelation from above. I must do as Heaven bids.'

'You have been imposed upon, Nawab Sahib. The apparition of the Saiyad that you saw in the tomb at Chunderbagh, was



an affair of jugglery and trickery contrived by a device very common among us for amusing or frightening children—a kind of lantern, with transparent glass shade.'

'How know you aught of it?' asked the other, with unfeigned surprise.

Mr. Dacres smiled. 'The pistol-shot that caused the Saiyad to disappear—you heard a pistol-shot, did you not?'

'I did.'

'Well, that was aimed by a friend of mine, who witnessed the whole occurrence, and shattered to pieces the glass of the instrument by which this contrivance was effected!'

The Nawab stared in silence. Dacres continued—

'What I say must be the truth—how else could I have known anything about it? And see, to convince you still more, here are some fragments of the shattered glass I have brought to show you. I have to-day sent a party to arrest a number of conspirators at Meer Ali Moorad's house: this house is connected with the tomb by a covered way, and it was by this means that you were imposed upon.'

'You have sent a party to arrest Meer Ali Moorad?'

'Yes, and others: there is a man among them, I am told, of a fair countenance, with

blue eyes and light hair, more like a European than an Asiatic ——'

'You have sent to arrest HIM!' exclaimed the Nawab, as if horror-struck at the idea of such audacity.

'Yes.'

'Then it has begun.'

The Nawab rose, and walked two or three times up and down the apartment, with his head on his breast and his eyes fixed steadily on the floor, playing all the time with the jewelled handle of a dirk he carried sheathed in his waistband. At length he stopped opposite Mr. Dacres, and looked him full in the face.

'You are a good Christian, I know—will you swear on your holy book, will you swear in the name of your holy prophet Jesus, that what you have told me is the truth—I mean about the jugglery?'

'Certainly, I will swear in the name of Jesus, whom we Christians worship—I swear it was the truth.'

Again the Nawab paced up and down the room in silence. Then he said—

'Sahib, I will trust you. As long as I am able to control my own men, I will protect you, and your ladies and children; but remember, as your government cannot control

their sepoy, the time may come when I may not be able to control mine. Till that time you are safe: after that, Alla protect us—I am guiltless.'

'It is well,' said Dacres, rising: 'now let us part, for we have much to do. If disturbance take place in the cantonment, I will send the ladies and children down here.'

The Nawab intimated his assent, and they shortly after parted.

## CHAPTER XIX.

BOTH the Nawab and the Commissioner went each his way with the subject of the late discussion fresh in their minds. The latter was relieved of a considerable deal of anxiety, for he believed that now the Nawab would throw his influence into the scale in favour of the British government. The Nawab, however, was less easy in mind even than he had been before. To him, undoubtedly, the easiest course was to swim with the tide; it was evident that the popular cause was the cause of the rebels; he had only to throw in his lot with them, to allow his name to be made use of as a sanction to their proceedings, to assume the government of the district or the province, nominally if he preferred an inactive share in the proceedings, and all his difficulties would be smoothed away. On the other hand, to side with the British was to struggle against the stream at fearful odds. How could he control his own retainers, his own family, his own wife? How could he, supported only by

a small party of English officers, encumbered with their families, preserve the peace of the district in the face of a numerous and powerful enemy, excited by love of plunder and fired with fanaticism?—nay, what chance had they of preserving even their lives? ‘It is destiny,’ he said, or rather sighed, to himself, as he reached the threshold of his house. ‘We are creatures of destiny; let the will of God be done.’

Feeling that he had much to think of, and a burden of anxiety on his mind, he sent for a pipe to assist him in bearing it. Ere it was brought, a servant came with a message from Leila, asking him to attend her in her apartment. So, ordering the pipe of consolation to be taken there, he rose and bent his steps towards the harem.

Leila did not disguise her anxiety to hear what had passed between her lord and the English commissioner, for she knew of the intended conference.

‘Leila will chide me when she hears,’ said the Nawab, in reply to her question.

‘Let me hear, then,’ she said, playfully seating herself at his knee on the carpet on which he was reclining, putting the ornamented silver mouthpiece of his hooka into his hand. ‘Have you given a promise not to slay the Kaffirs?’

‘More than that, my child,’ said the other, as if determined to let the worst come out at once, and trying to persuade himself and her, by his mode of address, that he was not afraid of her. ‘I have sworn to aid them.’

‘To aid them!’ said, or rather shrieked, Leila, ‘to aid those whom Alla has marked down for destruction—to aid the enemies of your country and your faith? These English must be wonderful people: how could the Feringhee so persuade you—talk you over? Oh, Nawab, you are too soft-hearted—too easily won—too easily worked upon by any tale of distress.’

‘You women, shut up all your lives in the harem, know nothing about the affairs of state,’ replied the Nawab rather peevishly: ‘how could you know? The English commissioner is a wise man, and I have had much experience.’

‘And do you disregard so calmly the anger of Heaven, when the will of the Most High was so plainly manifested to you at the holy Saiyad’s tomb?’

‘Leila, I believe—nay, I have found out—there has been some trickery, some jugglery, here. What I saw was no vision, but the effect of some machination that these Feringhees from the West are familiar with. The

English commissioner knew all about my visit to the tomb, although I went alone. The explosion I heard there—you recollect I told you all that had passed—was the report from an Englishman's pistol, whose ball shattered the machine by which the deception was being played upon me.'

Leila looked up to him, and into his eyes with an enquiring gaze. She evidently thought he had been bewitched, and was under the influence of some glamour or spell. Asiatics are particularly prone to believe in such influences.

'You look at me uneasily, my love—you think I have been bewitched, because I speak to you the conviction of my heart, and the result of sound reasoning and much reflection. What say you when I tell you the English commissioner showed me a fragment of the glass of the broken instrument?'

'Yes, my lord, I do think you have been brought under the influence of some spell that Heaven will in time rend in twain, and set you free. It was but this morning that my morning slumbers were blest with a dream so bright and beautiful, that I have been gazing on it in my mind's eye ever since. I saw you returning from hunting, attended by a regal suite, and all the emblems of sovereignty; and I ran to meet you: and as you clasped me

to your arms you called me, "my own Leila, my queen!"'

Fired with the animation that lit up her beautiful features, and flashed forth from those full round orbs into which you might gaze as into a bottomless cistern of the purest water, Leila, as she spoke, looked indeed a queen; and her husband felt how bright a jewel he possessed, as he clasped her to his breast.

'Leila, you are a queen, you are my queen! What is there you want, what desire on earth is there ungratified, that makes you wish I was what I am not?'

'I would have you fulfil your destiny, fulfil the noble duty Heaven has marked out for you.'

'And my destiny will be fulfilled. But let us not waste our words: my resolution has been made, and my word given; and nothing that even you, Leila, can say, can alter it. I have promised the English commissioner to assist them, and protect their wives and families.'

'Then the English ladies you will take?'

'Yes; and they shall be under your charge, Leila.'

'Shall I have them for slaves?'

'Slaves, child?—no; as honoured guests.'



‘They are very beautiful, are they not, these English ladies?—I have heard so.’

‘Yes, they are very beautiful, most of them, fair and sweet as the blushing roses of Cashmere. They are wise, too, and chaste, though their notions of modesty do not assort with ours.’

‘And in their society you will soon learn to forget your Leila! Ha! is this the tempting bait that has lured you from the path of duty? I had a sworn promise from you once, that no woman should enter these walls except as my slave. Shall I live to see that promise broken?’

‘Well, Leila, if you please they shall have another part of the palace allotted to them, and you shall neither see nor hear them.’

‘Only to know that you are happy in their company away from me?’

‘Foolish child, it is you who are bewitched now; what cause have I given you for this peevish jealousy? Do you not see that by protecting the English ladies, I secure a hostage for myself, and earn a right to the gratitude of a race that never forget their benefactors ——’

‘Except when it suits their purposes. Have I not read in those books you have given me—have I not heard even from your own lips, over and over again, the story of these

treacherous Kaffirs?—how their progress in Hindustan has been made step by step, each step deeper in infamy and ingratitude and treachery than the last: how they have made tools of kings, nawabs, and princes; fostered and protected them while it suited their purpose to do so, and then, when the time came, throwing them over and making them a stepping-stone to the next object of ambition and avarice? With them treaty means a compact to be kept while convenient, an oath means a promise to be broken at the fitting time, an ally a machine to work out their own purposes.—Oh no, my lord, you are trifling with your Leila—you are testing her womanish credulity; you never mean to refuse the prize now within your reach. Let those captives be sent here; you shall reign in regal state, and you shall find me attended by those beautiful proud English dames you admire so much; their charms shall serve to set off mine—I will make their bondage light, but I must have fifty of the best at least ——’

‘Foolish child, you talk of what you do not understand. The Western ladies are proud and high-born; the best and purest blood flows in their veins—they are as high-spirited as you yourself, and would die a thousand deaths rather than be disgraced by servitude. No,

Leila, these wild notions of yours do not please me.'

'And do you think your retainers and subjects will submit to this? Is not the whole world of Islam moving with a mighty spirit of freedom and glorious independence—a spirit that will rouse all the sons of Islam to a united effort to trample the Cross under foot, and destroy the Nazarenes from the face of the earth? Those who oppose it will perish like the Kaffirs!'

'Pish! child — you speak like a true daughter of the Prophet, but not like one who knows the world. In six months England alone could send soldiers enough to Hindustan to trample out the last spark of our religion, and to make the land one vast sea of ruin and desolation. It may be that Heaven has willed their destruction; if so, it is by a miracle, for without a miracle our efforts against these Franks would be in vain: and if it is by a miracle that Heaven will accomplish its end, then let us see it. It is all one to Alla to slay with the sword of the faithful, or to cause the earth to open and to swallow up alive the unbelievers; but to act with treachery, and to assassinate in cold blood those who dwell peacefully among us and labour for our good—to turn upon those

they have sworn to serve, as the sepoys have done, is not pleasing to Alla. I will remain faithful to the cause of the English while I can. If they prevail, we shall prosper in their prosperity; if they fail by a miracle from Heaven, then may we too escape by a miracle.'

'No! Heaven will work no miracle to save those who are faithless to our religion. You will perish—you will be swept away to make room for those who show themselves true sons of the Prophet.—Your Leila will not survive your disgrace; she will perish with you.'

'Alla forbid it,' said the Nawab with a sigh.—'Hark! what is that?'—and they both started to their feet in an attitude of the deepest attention.

Another conference was broken in upon by the same cause and at the same moment.

Graham immediately on his return went to seek the repose he stood so much in need of. The interest excited by recent events, in which he had borne so large a share, had served to distract his mind in a great measure from the subject that lay at his heart's core, and which had done so much to destroy his happiness and peace. On his way back to the cantonment after the morning's adventure, the past recurred to his mind with more than ordinary vividness, and do what he would he

found it impossible to drive the image of Amy Leslie from his thoughts. Why it should have recurred at that particular time, he was not philosopher enough to divine; it was merely because he was tired and fagged or wearied out, and had not his mental energies in full activity. At times like these, we are always liable to be more affected by any impressions or morbid fancies that have put the mind out of tune, and which are just as much signs that the health of the mind has been disordered, as headaches or sickness are signs of a diseased body. In this way he kept reasoning with himself, as if his nature were divided into two existences or antagonistic elements, reason and feeling. Independent of other considerations and the circumstances that stood between him and the object of his dearest wishes, 'was this a time,' he asked himself, 'to pursue schemes Utopian and Quixotic enough at the best? Was this a time for the course of true love to run smoothly? was this a time, when every minute might usher in the anarchy and distress of a mutiny, for him to be fostering a hopeless passion with dreams or fancies that at best could only serve to feed his excited imagination?' Again and again he said to himself,

'Is this a time to plant and build,  
Add house to house and field to field,

When round our walls the battle lowers,  
And mines are hid beneath our towers?’

Burleigh might have laid these lines to heart, but did not, for he had never heard them. Confident in the success of his suit if pressed on with vigour, and encouraged by the manifest leaning towards him evinced by Mrs. Stevens and her husband, he had determined on bringing matters to an issue, so far at least as speaking to Captain and Mrs. Stevens, and soliciting their permission to urge his suit upon their sister. It may seem strange that, under such circumstances, people should have had time or inclination to think about such matters as love-making and marriage; but experience has shown that in periods of the greatest peril, and when imminent danger hangs over the heads of those exposed to it, so long as it is not actually present, men become habituated to the feeling, and will continue their usual avocations unmoved by the threatening of the storm, or the rumbling of the distant earthquake. The Stevenses, however, felt that on the occasion of an outbreak they were particularly exposed to danger. Their own children were a sufficient source of anxiety; but when to this was added the responsibility of protecting their sister too, the difficulties became increased

tenfold. By taking advantage of circumstances, by prudence and caution, and the exercise of coolness and courage, Captain Stevens felt that he might be able to provide for the safety of his wife and children ; but his sister's presence, and the danger to which she would be exposed equally with them, rendered the chances of escape obviously far less than if she had a protector of her own. Often and often did they debate the subject with one another as they lay awake at night, their darling little ones fast asleep in their little cots beside them. They had already had more than their share of troubles, for theirs had been the first house which had been fixed on as a prey by the incendiaries. That an outbreak was inevitable, was the firm conviction Stevens had arrived at after his adventure in the conspirator's house. It seemed now to be merely a question of time. They might have a respite ; it might be short, or it might be long, but the storm had gathered above their heads, and the doubt was—when would it burst ?

And so it happened that when Burleigh, on the same morning on which the events last described took place, appeared at their house, and, in an interview with Stevens and his wife, when Amy was not present, stated his

views and wishes, and made use of the argument, among others, that though the present might not be a suitable time for marriage and its usual consequent rejoicings, such a connection could not but add immeasurably to the chances of Amy's safety, they received his proposals favourably, and not only accorded their permission, but added every encouragement they could to him to advance his suit.

The main object of his visit being over, and having been attended by success far beyond his fondest expectations, Burleigh rose to go, and Mrs. Stevens went straight to her sister's room to communicate the information, and her own and her husband's wishes on the subject.

'You know, dearest,' she said, after telling her, in a plain, straightforward, and simple manner, the object of Burleigh's visit, 'that we should be sorry, very sorry, to part. But we could not expect you to remain always with us; and besides that, we feel certain that Mr. Burleigh will make a good and affectionate husband, and is comfortably situated; you will be so much safer with him than with us, exposed as you necessarily will be with us to all the dangers that surround a large family, and that are increased tenfold



by every additional person on whom that danger may fall.'

'You want to get rid of me, I see, Sophy,' said she, smiling, though sadly.

'You know me too well for there to be any fear of misunderstanding me, otherwise I should not have said what I have, Amy,' said her sister, kissing her. 'But if you are to be Mrs. Burleigh, why not be so now, when he could protect you so much better than we can? Indeed, if it had not been for this, I would have proposed your waiting as long as he could be induced to wait.'

'But suppose I do not intend to be Mrs. Burleigh at all, Sophy, what then?'

'Ah, then indeed! that alters the case.'

'Yes, it does slightly,' said Amy, laughing outright; 'and to tell the sober honest truth, I never do intend to be, unless, indeed, I have the alternative of being burnt alive, or massacred, or being Mrs. Burleigh: that, indeed, alters the case.'

'Do not talk so dreadfully, Amy. God forbid it should come to that! but you know Mr. Burleigh would be able to protect you, if any one can.'

'I would rather, far rather, stay with you and the children, and share your dangers and distress, if it pleases God we should see the

worst. I would—indeed I would. I could not leave you now, Sophy; no, I would not do so, even if I were deeply in love, which I am not—at least with Mr. Burleigh!’ she added, in a kind of spoken parenthesis, and blushing at the time: ‘besides, it would be so dreadful to be married now—it would seem absolutely wicked. No, Sophy! if Mr. Burleigh speaks to me, I shall tell him; and if he speaks to you, do you tell him. My mind is made up; I would not do it for the world.’

‘I have scarcely a right to ask you, I suppose, Amy, but I *am* curious to know: is there anyone else you would marry now?’

‘No,’ said Amy, after a slight, very slight pause. ‘I think it would be wrong. I would not at such a time as this, for all the world, multiply any man’s anxieties by giving him a newly-married wife to protect: no, it would be wrong.’

‘But I do not understand Mr. Burleigh. He seemed so confident that the only thing to be secured in the case was our consent. Have you encouraged his love?’ Amy blushed again.

‘Yes, Sophy; and to tell the truth, this is what has been making me so unhappy. I was a foolish, thoughtless girl; and before I knew anything of my own heart, I did let him

talk nonsense to me in a way I ought never to have allowed. I meant nothing, but I suppose he did.'

'Indeed he did. Do you know, Amy, he is very much in love with you. I am sorry for this.'

'It was wrong, very wrong of me,' she said, fairly bursting into tears. 'I cannot tell you how sorry I am.'

'Well, Amy, what is past cannot be undone. There is this consolation, at any rate, that in the active scenes we must all soon take part in, and especially the gentlemen, there will be very little leisure for any of us to brood over our own sorrows, or to attend to feelings. —Hark! what is that?'

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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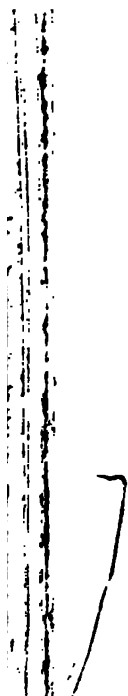
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